POWER PRAGMATISM

by

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Abstract

The American pragmatist tradition associated with John Dewey, William James, and others promises to bridge the gap between, on the one hand, abstract and generalizable analyses of political life and, on the other hand, practical efforts to redress political problems that are always specific in their context and effects. A persistent criticism of pragmatism has been that its problem-centric liberalism has tended to obscure from view issues of social, economic, and political power. This dissertation attempts to articulate a "power pragmatism" that combines Dewey's skepticism of abstraction with a Foucauldian understanding of public problems as traversed by shifting relations of power and resistance. Such a perspective draws attention to the specific feedback loops that sustain a given situation and produce a particular set of consequences and to how these feedback loops are conditioned by and reinforce power differentials among social groups. Shulamith Firestone, I argue, exemplifies this Deweyan-Foucauldian combination. Her *Dialectic of Sex* contends that technoscientific tools like contraception and artificial wombs can be used to shift the responsibility of childbearing from women and dissolve sex-class domination at the root. Firestone focuses on relations of domination as a structuring feature of social reality, and she offers a disarmingly straightforward attempt to reconstruct pregnancy and gender through technology. The practical radicalism that results does not shy away from the liberatory potential within some forms of technology. I develop this point further in the last chapter, a discussion of how the technical-material infrastructure of a society might be arranged to maximize the spaces for survival, resistance, and autonomy.

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Introduction | Escape from eminence

> The 'best' theories do not constitute a very effective protection against disastrous political choices.
>
> — Michel Foucault

Does the labor of drawing sophisticated associations between ideas have political or social correlates? John Dewey had his doubts. "The social philosopher," he writes, "dwelling in the region of his concepts, 'solves,' problems by showing the relationship of ideas instead of helping men solve problems in the concrete by supplying them with hypotheses to be used and tested in projects of reform. Meanwhile, of course, the concrete troubles and evils remain."[1] That's not to say, however, that political and social theorists remain indifferent to concrete troubles and evils. The question of what actually happens—in political struggles, to the planet, with experiments in self-governance large and small, to the wellbeing of humans and the other animals—motivates much of the published work in political theory. Often, however, this concern for what happens tends to appear, like a waved handkerchief, at the end of books and articles. After long, careful parsing of sophisticated texts and abstruse debates, works in political theory often conclude by turning toward certain necessities: "to ensure the meeting of needs and to foster human flourishing,"[2] "to

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[1] John Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (New York: Henry Holt, 1920), 191-94.

2 Tony Monchinski, *Education in Hope: Critical Pedagogies and the Ethic of Care* (Baltimore: Peter Lang, 2010), 189.

take better care of things, ourselves, and others,"[3] "to bring about a new configuration of the world,"[4] and so forth.

What would political theory look like if these concerns for what actually happens and the relationship our work assumes toward what actually happens were set at the center of political theory instead of at the margin?[5]

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3 Paul Rabinow, *Anthropos Today* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 136.

4 Samuel Chambers, *The Lessons of Rancière* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 169.

5 For related debate in another field, see Paul Romer, "The Trouble with Macroeconomics," forthcoming, 2016, http://ccl.yale.edu/sites/default/files/files/The%20Trouble%20with%20Macroeconomics.pdf. Romer argues that macroeconomists are overly reliant on sophisticated mathematical models that bear little relation to reality. "All I'm asking," he remarks when asked about his paper, "is that macroeconomists acknowledge that facts are relevant to what they do." Romer's argument parallels an earlier argument made in my own field by Jeffrey Isaac's "The Strange Silence of Political Theory," *Political Theory* 23, no. 4 (1995): 636-652. Writing in 1995, Isaac asks why top journals in political theory have published little work on the collapse of the USSR. He writes that "one would have expected that such dramatic and consequential events would have been grist for the mill of American political theorists," but that, on the contrary, "in the four years following the revolutions of 1989 political theorists published a total of 384 articles, of which a mere 2… dealt with dramatic current events of earth-shattering importance." (Isaac's numbers are drawn from issues of *Political Theory*, the *APSR*, *PPA*, and *Ethics*.) For Isaac, this elision flags political theory's too-keen interest in abstruse debates about how to interpret canonical authors and the way this approach obscures analysis of occurent politics. Theorists "have become ensnared in their various disciplinary matrices," Isaac argues. "Preoccupied with situating ourselves vis-a-vis the writing of Strauss and Arendt, Adorno and Lyotard, we have become puzzle solvers of the problems of others, focusing on approved topics, following academic conventions." Isaac avers that this state of affairs applies to mainstream liberal political theory, to be sure, but also to traditions that understand themselves as more "radical," whose practitioners, he argues, "have managed to constitute a thoroughly normalized discourse of 'subversion,' whereby theoretical puzzles—the problematics of identity, the effectivity of desire, the transgression of boundaries—get worked out in connection with Plato, Augustine, Machiavelli, Arendt, ad infinitum. The same theorists—Nietzsche, Foucault—establish the terms of reference, the same vocabularies and metaphors are deployed and redeployed, the same texts continually cited." Isaac's paper mirrors Romer's argument that macroeconomics' attachment to prevailing disciplinary norms—e.g., the macroeconomists' use of recondite mathematical models that rely on entities like "imaginary shocks" whose real existence is seen as beside the point—constrains

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Dewey and Michel Foucault have, at different points in their work, thought carefully about the connections between political struggle and the labor of drawing connections between abstractions. Dewey has argued for moving social inquiry away from "'solv[ing]' problems by showing the relationship of ideas."[6] Foucault, too, criticized Jacques Derrida on similar grounds, writing that Derrida "supposes… that all knowledge, or in an even broader sense all rational discourse, entertains a fundamental relation with philosophy…. To free the implicit philosophy of a discourse, to reveal its contradictions, its limits, or its naivety, is to operate *a fortiori* and by the shortest possible route a critique of all that is said within it."[7] Foucault rejects an associational practice of analysis whose task is to reveal the relationship

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its ability to incorporate facts about the world, or indeed any kind of sedulous attention to the world, into macroeconomic analyses. Romer, referencing similar debates in theoretical physics, warns that "the evolution of macroeconomics mirrors developments in string theory from physics, which suggests that they are examples of a general failure mode of for [*sic*] fields of science that rely on mathematical theory in which facts can end up being subordinated to the theoretical preferences of revered leaders." Isaac, I think, would suggest that this "general failure mode" is not restricted to disciplines that employ math.

For further reflection on the techniques Romer discusses, see Olivier Blanchard, "Do DSGE Models Have a Future?" PIIE, 2016, https://piie.com/system/files/documents/pb16-11.pdf. For similar arguments within theoretical physics, see Lee Smolin, *The Trouble With Physics* (Wilmington, MA: Mariner Books, 2007). For replies to Isaac's article, see Samuel Chambers, *Untimely Politics* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003), 73-76, 84-87, and 90-93, as well as responses by Seyla Benhabib, William E. Connolly, Kristie M. McClure, Elizabeth Kiss, and Michael Gillespie in *Political Theory* 23, no. 4 (1995).

[6] Dewey, *Reconstruction*, 191-94.

[7] Michel Foucault, "Reply to Derrida," in *History of Madness*, trans. Jonathan Murphy and Jean Khalfa (New York: Routledge, 2006), 575-78.

between deeply-set, essential ideas at the heart of one text and deeply-set, essential ideas at the heart of another. Moreover, Foucault brings forward questions about the relationship between theory and what happens in the world.[8] He is often quite frank, as when he says that "the 'best' theories do not constitute a very effective protection against disastrous political choices." Just before making that remark, Foucault relates this story, which stems from a conversation he'd had with Habermas:

> After explaining how Heidegger's thought indeed constituted a "political disaster," [Habermas] mentioned one of his professors who was a great Kantian, very well-known in the '30s, and he explained how astonished and disappointed he had been when, while looking through card catalogues one day, he found some texts from around 1934 by this illustrious Kantian that were thoroughly Nazi in orientation.
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> I have just recently had the same experience with Max Pohlenz, who heralded the universal values of Stoicism all his life. I came across a text of his from 1934 devoted to *Führertum* in Stoicism. You should reread the introductory page and the book's closing remarks on the *Führersideal* and on the true humanism constituted by the Volk under the inspiration of the leader's direction—Heidegger never wrote anything more disturbing. Nothing in this condemns Stoicism or Kantianism, needless to say.[9]

Foucault then invites his interviewer to "reckon with several facts," including the "tenuous 'analytic' link between a philosophical conception and the concrete political attitude of someone who is appealing to it," and that "certain great themes… can be

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[8] I don't mean to imply with this "theory vs. what happens in the world" phrasing that theory does not count as something that happens in the world. Hardly! It might be more accurate to write, instead of theory vs. the world, what happens inside seminar rooms/the skulls of grad students and professors/journals in political theory vs. what happens outside of them.

[9] Foucault, *Foucault Reader*, 374.

used to any end whatever." He pauses, then, and swerves away from the temptation to separate theory and world:

> I do not conclude from this that one may say just anything within the order of theory, but, on the contrary, that a demanding, prudent, "experimental" attitude is neces[s]ary; at every moment, step by step, one must confront what one is thinking and saying with what one is doing, with what one is. I have never been too concerned about people who say: "You are borrowing ideas from Nietzsche; well, Nietzsche was used by the Nazis, therefore…"; but, on the other hand, I have always been concerned with linking together as tightly as possible the historical and theoretical analysis of power relations, institutions, and knowledge, to the movements, critiques, and experiences that call them into question in reality. If I have insisted on all this "practice," it has not been in order to "apply" ideas, but in order to put them to the test and modify them. The key to the personal poetic attitude of a philosopher is not to be sought in his ideas, as if it could be deduced from them, but rather in his philosophy-as-life, in his philosophical life, his ethos.[10]

In my view, Foucault is knocking his shovel against a problem fundamental for political theory. To conclude, in response to the tenuous connection between theory and concrete political views, that the practice of theory does *nothing* and has *no* relation to what happens in the world remains an unsatisfactory withdrawal.

As an explanatory or descriptive tool, moreover, theory seems to have no built-in procedures or mechanisms for figuring out when it has accurately understood the ramifications of real-world developments and when it has not (on the contrary, really-existing theory seems to possess an infinite plasticity for explaining how a new development is a demonstration or exegesis of what it has always known). What

[10] Ibid.

Foucault gestures at is the prospect for a technology or set of practices for theory to take up as a mechanism for, among other things, getting a sense of when it's missed the mark. Or, in extreme cases, when it's sliding in the directions that Pohlenz, Heidegger, or Habermas's renowned Kantian did. Well, you might object, that last point about Pohlenz and Heidegger is hyperbolic—I think we'd know if *that* were happening. But *how* would we know? How do you tell the difference between Slavoj Žižek endorsing Donald Trump as a clever performance of a particular left-wing indictment of liberalism and Richard Spencer endorsing Donald Trump as a clever performance of a particular right-wing indictment of liberalism? I don't doubt that there is a difference, but I am interested in how we know we know that there is one. Foucault's reflections on Pohlenz suggest that theory will not be able to develop any early warning or feedback system in the realm of ideas working on other ideas for indicating when it is off the mark or moving in Pohlenzian directions. If these warning systems are to be found, they lie (for Foucault, for Dewey, and for me) in engagement with what actually happens—with "the movements, critiques, and experiences" that arise in concrete situations. This difficulty does not only confront Kantians, Heideggerians, or the other major hierophantic traditions: it applies to "minor theory" as well, to works that explore open-world cosmologies and celebrate contestation and seek to "light fires, watch the grass grow, listen to the wind… catch the sea foam in the breeze and scatter it… [that] multiply, not judgments, but signs of

existence… a criticism of scintillating leaps of the imagination… [that] bear[s] the lightning of possible storms."[11]

That's fine for you to criticize the practices of associational critique and abstraction, someone might object (again), but what then is political theory supposed to do? It has "theory" right in the name. It is true that Foucault does say that he is not interested in a theory that "guides" practice as if from above, but this is only en route to saying that theory and practice are and must be plaited together in the braid of experience, of "philosophy-as-life, in… philosophical life, [in] ethos." Recall that Foucault says too that "equipment… is the medium through which logos is transformed into ethos" and that Paul Rabinow, exploring what this Foucauldian "equipment" might consist of, suggests the work of building a "toolkit of concepts for conducting inquiries into the contemporary world in its actuality" and working so that those inquiries should make "the relations, connections, and disjunction between logos and ethos apparent and available… to make those relations part of inquiry itself as well as part of a life."[12] Foucault's and Rabinow's search for concretely-grounded philosophical equipment finds further elaboration in William C. Wimsatt's work on putting practice at the center of theory rather than the other way around: "We also need a context of real problems, keeping us honest in ways that idealizations and toy

[11] Michel Foucault, "The Masked Philosopher," in *The Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984*, vol. 1 (New York: New Press, 1997), 323.

[12] Paul Rabinow, *Anthropos Today: Reflections on Modern Equipment*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 12. The original logos/ethos quote is the epigraph of that book.

examples common in philosophy often fail to do. In practice we use surprisingly powerful heuristic tools rather than such idealizations to structure our search. These new tools are sources of inspiration for an alternative, robust, naturalistic, and scientifically motivated realist philosophy."[13] Wimsatt urges the development of concrete, grounded heuristic techniques rather than reliance on abstraction:

> we start with our actual practice—but seeing these practices for their strengths as evolved cognitive adaptations rather than as compromised attempts to pursue our ideals. These 'deviations' are not failings, but the source of our peculiar strengths in this uncertain world of complex, evolving beings, technologies, and institutions… [These practices are] neither axioms nor algorithms… they are re-tuned, re-modulated, re-contextualized, and often newly reconnected piecemeal rearrangements of existing adaptations or exaptations, and they encourage us to do likewise with whatever we construct.[14]

This project pursues a more heuristic, flexible, and grounded theoretical practice, one in which our drive for a different world lies at the center of our work rather than at the end.

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I am not arguing that all theory is useless, only that most theoretical work entertains by necessity a vexed relationship with what is occurent and that theoretical practice going forward ought to map and incorporate the feedback loops that operate

[13] William C. Wimsatt, *Re-engineering Philosophy for Limited Beings: Piecewise Approximations to Reality* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 5.

[14] Ibid., 10. Some emphasis removed.

between theory and the real world as a point of departure for further inquiry. This task, of course, harks back to Antonio Gramsci's questions about theory and practice in his prison notebooks and his call for a "study of how 'situations' should be analysed, a.k.a. how to establish the various levels of the relations of force [and] the science and art of politics… understood as a body of practical rules for research and of detailed observations useful for awakening an interest in effective reality and for stimulating more rigorous and more vigorous political insights." Gramsci further argues that "this [type of inquiry] should be accompanied by the explanation of what is meant in politics by strategy and tactics, by strategic 'plan,' by propaganda and agitation, by command structure or science of political organisation and administration."[15] In a sense, the starting point I am proposing here is by necessity a rearticulation of Gramsci's interest in a concrete philosophy of praxis, albeit laden with a different political context and spanning different theoretical boundaries. The undertaking I am suggesting encompasses a variety of theoretical practices, many of which are guaranteed to be not just unanticipated but unanticipatable. Examples of plausible paths forward in this area might include J.K. Gibson-Graham's work on the Latrobe Valley and in producing a handbook like *Take Back the Economy*,[16] Reza Negarestani's interest in cognitive mapping as a technique for directing concrete

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[15] Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (New York: International Publishers Co., 1971), 176-77.

[16] J.K. Gibson-Graham, *A Postcapitalist Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006) and *Take Back the Economy: An Ethical Guide to Transforming Our Communities* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013).

action,[17] Tiziana Terranova's work on reprogramming existing technosocial systems "away from recent trends towards corporatisation and monetization" and "draw[ing] together current experimentation with hardware able to support a new breed of 'imaginary apps'" that might facilitate ends such as "allow[ing] migrants to bypass border controls… or… to track the origin of commodities, their degrees of exploitation,"[18] Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor's work on how the movement for black lives can be linked to further projects for black liberation,[19] and, of course, Gramsci's own arguments that, e.g., "elements of empirical observation which are habitually included higgledy-piggledy in works of political science… ought, in so far as they are not abstract and illusory, to be inserted into the context of the relations of force, on one level or another."[20] This dissertation, which combines the work of Dewey and Foucault to build a power-sensitive pragmatist political theory capable of contributing to more survivable futures, hopes to draw from these projects' theoretically-informed

[17] "Unlike classical Marxism," Michael Albert writes of accelerationists and neorationalists like Negarestani, "which posited deterministic laws and claimed to know the course of history, this navigational conception of rational agency [advanced by accelerationist and neorationalist thought] is one that aims to 'cognitively map' society as a complex phase space of cross cutting trajectories in order to render social complexity intelligible and enhance left capacities for strategic action." See Michael Albert, "Praxis, Technology, Hegemony: The Challenge of Left Accelerationism," forthcoming, 2017, and Reza Negarestani, "The Labor of the Inhuman," parts I and II, *E-flux*, no. 53, 2013.

[18] Tiziana Terranova, "Red Stack Attack! Algorithms, capital, and the automation of the commons," in *Accelerate: The Accelerationist Reader*, ed. Robin Mackay and Armen Avanessian (Falmouth, UK: Urbanomic, 2014), 381-99. See also the fourth chapter of this dissertation, which pursues a project related to the one Terranova advocates.

[19] Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2016).

[20] Gramsci, *Notebooks*, 176.

engagements with the world and to affirm Emerson's dictum that "the existing world is not a dream, and cannot with impunity be treated as a dream."[21]

This undertaking draws on three problematics active in contemporary political theory. The first area of inquiry works with resonances between Dewey's pragmatism and Foucault's work on power relations. The connections between Dewey and Foucault have been examined by John Stuhr, Colin Koopman, and others[22] in the last two decades, but essential questions remain underexplored, especially those having to do with each thinker's treatment of power relations.

The second problematic is more closely related to the discussion of Foucault that began this introduction. It has to do with a way of discussing the relationship between political theory and politics. In recent years, Raymond Geuss and William A. Galston[23] have identified an unexpected "realist" streak in political theory spanning thinkers like Bonnie Honig, Bernard Williams, Jeremy Waldron, William E. Connolly,

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[21] Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The Conservative," in *Nature; Addresses and Lectures* (Boston: James Munroe and Co., 1849), 293.

[22] See inter alia John Stuhr, *Genealogical Pragmatism* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1997); John Stuhr, *Pragmatism, Postmodernism, and the Future of Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 2003); a collection edited by Paul Fairfield entitled *John Dewey and Continental Philosophy* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2013); and much of Colin Koopman's work, perhaps starting with "Genealogical Pragmatism: How History Matters for Foucault and Dewey," *Journal of the Philosophy of History* 5 (2011): 533–561.

[23] Raymond Geuss, *Philosophy and Real Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008); William A. Galston, "Realism in Political Theory," Brookings Institution draft, 2007.

and others.[24] For these small-r realists, the "high liberalism" of Rawls, Dworkin, and their hierophants "evades" rather than engages with politics.[25] The realists remain skeptical of attempts to construct ideal theories of politics or formulas for justice that exceed social and material contexts. Instead, they emphasize the context and embedded status of political problems, the question of what actually happens in a political situation, and a careful attention to power relations.[26] Theory realism moves the relationship between theory and politics away from an approach in which theorists draw conclusions about the "nature" of this or that political idea or draw and redraw borders and connections between ideas on a conceptual field while implying that some indelible but inarticulable relationship to politics inheres in this work. Power pragmatism builds from the realist rejection of abstracted theoretical work to offer an alternative conception of the relationship between politics and theory: one that is heuristic, problem-oriented, concerned about the real operations of power, and interested in abstractions only insofar as they lead to or make possible certain real outcomes.

The third problematic has to do with how feminist attention to science, technology, and society can generate new tactics and roadmaps for how to develop more egalitarian relations between humans. In *The Dialectic of Sex*, Shulamith Firestone

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[24] Galston, "Realism."

[25] Ibid., 1-3, and following Honig's remark that liberal theorists often seek "the displacement of politics in political theory."

[26] Geuss, *Real*, 11-16.

advocates the aggressive use of reproductive technology to relieve women from the burden of child-bearing and, eventually, to reshuffle gender itself. I argue that Firestone's radical approach is more than a curio of '70s-era feminism: it shows how radical political programs must turn their attention to the interrelations of science, technology, and society and begin to rework them for political ends. Firestone's work, in short, shows one route for linking power pragmatism as a political theory to really-existing political problems. This path can be extended, I will argue, further than Firestone took it, toward an analysis of the technology stacks and critical infrastructure services that make human lives and lifestyles possible.

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Chapter one shows how Dewey's pragmatism offers a flexible, holistic, forward-looking, reconstructive, problem-oriented approach to social and political problems. This framework makes it possible to say sophisticated things about hard problems, like the constitution of the self or what a "public" is, largely without recourse to foundational claims, systems of abstract propositions, or inflexible "first principles." Pragmatism gets caught up in metaphysical or eristic debates less often than it might in part because of its forward-moving, problem-oriented, and reconstructive character. Dewey encourages political actors "to focus on the meliorative attunement to difficulties at hand, and to furnish for ourselves possibilities of improvement on

the basis of resources made available to us by the wider environments."[27] As appealing as this approach might sound in summary, American pragmatism is hindered by a longstanding blind spot. Pragmatists like Dewey tend not to adequately address unequal relations between human beings or the structures that countenance these inequalities. As R. W. Hildreth tells us, "one of the most enduring criticisms of John Dewey's political thought is that it is unsuspicious of power."[28]

If Deweyan pragmatism offers an attractive approach to social and political problems but is hamstrung by its relative blindness to power, how do you go about mixing in—like introducing a stabilizing species into an ecosystem—an account of power? And how do you pick an analysis of power that fits in the pragmatist biome? After all, many available accounts of power invoke broad sets of claims incompatible with the pragmatist approach. What I'm looking for is a sophisticated account of power—an analysis of how relations of domination, say, distort the social field—situated in a framework that complements rather than conflicts with Dewey's outlook.

Enter Foucault. "Dewey and Foucault," Richard Rorty argues, "make exactly the same criticism of the tradition. They agree, right down the line, about the need to abandon traditional notions of rationality, objectivity, method, and truth…. They agree that rationality is what history and society make it—that there is no overarching

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[27] Colin Koopman, "Foucault and Pragmatism: Introductory Notes on Metaphilosophical Methodology" *Foucault Studies*, no. 11 (2011): 3-10.

[28] R.W. Hildreth, "Reconstructing Dewey on Power," *Political Theory* 37, no. 6 (2009): 780.

ahistorical structure (the Nature of Man, the laws of human behavior, the Moral Law, the Nature of Society) to be discovered."[29] Rorty is neither the first nor last commenter to make this observation. Chapter one will be concerned in part with complicating this basic insight while departing from other Rortian claims (particularly those that understand Foucault as corrosively skeptical). The most important resonance between Dewey and Foucault for my purposes has to do with the way Foucault's analysis of power is both compatible and in tension with a Deweyan framework. The insight of Foucault's that structures contemporary discussions of power involves viewing power as a function of relations between people rather than a centrally-kept substance or bedrock of authority.[30] Power no longer rests with monarchs and judges, jealously guarded, doled out here and there. Instead, power tessellates through humans, institutions, social formations: fields of power as the patterns made by iron filings among shifting magnets rather than whatever was once meant by overfull words like "sovereignty," "authority," or "might." Foucault offers a view of power that does not overwrite pragmatist claims (or lack thereof) about epistemology, the possibility of fundaments for knowledge and ethics, and so on. Therefore, I offer Foucault's treatment of power—with special attention to his formulation in the first volume of his *History of Sexuality*—as a corrective to Dewey's relative blindness to power relations.

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[29] Richard Rorty, "Method, Social Science, and Social Hope," in *Consequences of Pragmatism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 582.

[30] Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power," *Critical Inquiry* 8, No. 4 (1982): 777-795.

Chapter one, therefore, describes (i) what Deweyan pragmatism has to offer, (ii) how it is hindered by its weak account of power, (iii) strengths and limitations of the current literature putting Dewey and Foucault into conversation, and (iv) the transition to chapter two, where power pragmatism is developed.

Chapter two links Dewey and Foucault on the basis of their shared skepticism toward purity and profundity, views of tragedy and futurity, interest in applied technology and social relations, and work on power. Dewey and Foucault both hold purity and profundity, as elements of philosophical and political projects, in skeptical regard. Dewey suspects that the combination and recombination of concepts in absence of sustained engagement with concrete experience has limited usefulness. Foucault, meanwhile, distances his work from a kind of purist antideviationism in which one method or principle holds sway and all aberrations to it are to be exposed and rooted out. Eddie Glaude writes that Dewey helps guide you away from the drive "to uncover one single principle of morality" in part because "these efforts [at one single principle], in whatever form, fail to acknowledge the centrality of uncertainty and conflict to our moral experiences."[31] Glaude builds from this Deweyan skepticism of moral purity a description of how pragmatism fits with a tragic worldview. Tragedy, in this sense, involves the recognition of being wounded but of having to go on. James Baldwin, as Glaude notes, has given famous expression to this sentiment. When asked if he consider himself a pessimist, Baldwin says that he cannot be a

[31] Eddie Glaude, *In a Shade of Blue: Pragmatism and the Politics of Black America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 26-27.

pessimist because he remains alive. "To be a pessimist," he continues, "means that you have agreed that human life is an academic matter, so I'm forced to be an optimist." Dewey, Glaude, and I would say *meliorist* in the place of Baldwin's "optimist," but the sentiment otherwise rings true. Foucault, for his part, exhibits a kind of tragic awareness when he writes and speaks about the prospect of using available political tools—including rights—to foment forms "of resistance against domination" and "intensification[s] of power relations."[32] Chapter two concludes with a discussion of cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT). I acknowledge that social theory has long exchanged ideas with psychoanalytic theory and suggest that it might benefit from a similar exchange with cognitive-behavioral therapy. I argue that CBT's interest in concrete procedures and intervening in feedback loops makes it an interesting, if unexpected, fit with a power-pragmatist approach. Chapter two closes with a discussion of the prospect of a cognitive-behavioral political theory.

I begin to "apply" power pragmatism in chapters three and four. Rather than immediately dropping the theory wholesale onto some unsuspecting situation or problem, I look to the recent history of political thought for work that exemplifies power-pragmatist engagement. Chapter three, therefore, centers on Shulamith Firestone's *Dialectic of Sex*.

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[32] Joan Reynolds, "'Pragmatic Humanism' in Foucault's Later Work," *Canadian Journal of Political Science / Revue canadienne de science politique* 37, no. 4 (2004): 972-73 and Michel Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?" in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon, 1984), 48.

Firestone argues for using new reproductive technologies to shift the burden of child-bearing away from women as part of a strategy for ending domination based on sex. Her vision of a future in which redistributing human reproductive capacity leads to changed social and economic conditions exemplifies a power-pragmatist approach to science, technology, and social relations. I argue that Firestone mobilizes a Deweyan sense of how science works and can be reworked (emphasizing instrumental doing-power rather than nomological deduction), a Deweyan sense of the possibility and necessity of holistic social change, and a deep sensitivity to unequal power relations. Firestone demonstrates how to reconceptualize and remake science-technology-social relations triads: register the deep and multiple interconnections between material forces and social relations, recognize science-technology as the enactment, recognition, manipulation, perforation, and remaking of material and social forces and assemblages, and remanipulate science-technology with the aim of reordering the social. (As the xenofeminists, following Firestone, write: "If nature is unjust, change nature!")[33]

Finally, chapter four shows how a power-pragmatist, Firestone-inspired use of science for egalitarian projects opens onto ways of thinking about the importance of infrastructure and life-support technology. I write about a way of thinking called "stacktivism" that examines how the interleaved stacks of technology that make your lifestyle possible also condition the political possibilities available to you. Stacktivists

[33] Laboria Cuboniks, "Xenofeminism: A Politics for Alienation," June 11, 2015, http://uberty.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/xenofeminism.pdf.

are inclined to ask questions like, "Who owns the means of not dying?" and "How can humans secure calories and heat without being subject to a sprawling national-security apparatus that secures the infrastructure that delivers food and electricity?" This focus on material realities and technical problems broadens Firestone's interest in applied technology and insists on the importance of concrete pragmatism for radical politics.

One of the aspirations of this project is to contribute to attempts to strategically instrumentalize (so as to deform and free) science and technology. Currently, technolibertarians, venture capitalists, and military-industrial actors own the vocabulary around advances in technological know-how. The Left needs this vocabulary, however, and we're coming to take it. The hope of this project is that a power-sensitive pragmatism can reshuffle the interrelations among science-technology-society, and can work to repurpose these relations toward securing a more survivable future.

Chapter one

§1.1 Power pragmatism

> Should I offer my congratulations? You have corralled a gorgeous mess of problems…. It's unclear how long this odd good fortune will last, however. So I suggest you act decisively to take maximum advantage of the opportunities that your dilemmas have cracked open. If anyone can turn the heartache of misplaced energy into practical wisdom, it's you. Is it possible to be both cunning and conscientious, both strategic and ethical? For you right now, I think it is.
>
> — Leo horoscope, week of 9/27/15, *City Paper*

The broad thesis of this study is that political theory at its best is encumbered by politics. I explore the idea that a significant part of the value of a political theory is pragmatic. That is to say, the relations a theory assumes with really-existing political problems matter a great deal.[34] In order to specify the contours and limits of the

[34] Sussing out what sorts of entities are invoked by "relations" in this sentence is no small task. See Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze, "Intellectuals and Power," in *Language, Counter-Memory, and Practice*, ed. Donald Bouchard (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972), 208; Colin Koopman, *Genealogy as Critique: Foucault and the Problems of Modernity* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2013), 133-34; John Dewey, "The Quest for Certainty," in *The Later Works of John Dewey*, vol. 4, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University, 1984), 181, 194; for an obliquely related view, Ludwig

relationship between political theory and politics, I draw from the pragmatist tradition, especially John Dewey, but also from the work of Michel Foucault, because of his focus on how theory and politics occur in fields of power and shifting relations of force. My aim is to articulate a problem-oriented, power-sensitive, purposeful relationship between theory and politics, a "power pragmatism."

§1.2 Coloring in pragmatism

What tools does Dewey offer for understanding political situations and developing a sense of what it means to live as a political being? Deweyan pragmatism offers a flexible, consilient, holistic, purposeful, forward-looking, reconstructive, resource-sensitive, meliorative approach to social and political problems. I'll explain each of these characteristics in order to paint a fuller picture of what Dewey's pragmatism is and what it's meant to do.

Pragmatism is flexible. The Deweyan approach opposes rigidity in thought, action, and method. Take Dewey's definition of freedom. For Dewey, freedom "consists in a trend of conduct that causes choices to be more diversified and flexible, more plastic and more cognizant of their own meaning, while it enlarges their range of unimpeded

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Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2011), §§109, 133.

operation."[35] Note the methodological flexibility at work: rather than an apodictic definition, gnomic pronouncement, or preexisting source that free selves draw on, freedom "consists in a trend of conduct." In the first six words of his definition, Dewey evades and unsettles received definitions of freedom. Understanding freedom as a trend of conduct introduces a new degree of flexibility. Discussing trends of conduct means accounting for successions of situations and their particulars rather

[35] John Dewey, "Philosophies of Freedom," in *The Essential Dewey: Ethics, Logic, Psychology*, vol. 2, ed. Larry Hickman and Thomas Alexander (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2009), 311. What does a "trend of conduct" consist of? Characteristically, Dewey does not give an account of what a trend "really is," or posit "tendencies" that broadly guide social life (as in Bergson's two tendencies of instinct and intelligence in *Creative Evolution* or the "open" and "closed" moral tendencies from *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*). Instead, a trend of conduct involves a shifting array of context-dependent dispositions, action, value judgments, material conditions, institutions, historically-assembled feedback loops, technics, and so on. If I bicycle to work this week, a roil of inputs (unseasonably warm weather has cleared the bike lane of snow, a road diet has calmed traffic on the residential throughway near my house, ground-level ozone has dropped) render this a "freer" trend of conduct not because it accords with an a priori definition of either "freedom" or "trend of conduct," but because the constituents that make it up, the context within which it occurs, the reciprocal relations it enters into, and the effects it has make it so. My cycling to work makes it safer for others to do so. This encourages more ridership, further lowering cycling fatalities, making way for still more humans on bikes. (See Rune Elvik, "The non-linearity of risk and the promotion of environmentally sustainable transport," *Accident Analysis & Prevention* 41, no. 4 [2009]: 849–855; Grégory Vandenbulcke et al., "Mapping bicycle use and the risk of accidents for commuters who cycle to work in Belgium," *Transport Policy* 16, no. 2 [2009]: 77–87; Judy Geyer et al., "Safety in Numbers: Data from Oakland, California," *Transportation Research Record*, no. 1982 [2006]: 150–154.) This brings into being a flowing constituency with determinate legal-material effects (traffic calming, the conversion of street parking into bike and bus lanes, year-over-year declines in childhood asthma) that also makes possible ways of being in the world that disrupt the commuter-consumer carbon-intensive system-environment hybrid. Often humble "trends of conduct" reach much further than anticipated. Recall Dewey's rejection of habit as merely "a recurrent external mode of action, like smoking or swearing…. Habit reaches even more significantly down into the very structure of the self; it signifies the building up and solidifying of certain desires; and increased sensitiveness and responsiveness to certain stimuli, a confirmed or an impaired capacity to attend to and think" (see *Later Works*, vol. 7, 170-71). I join Dewey in the expectation that when putatively radical social change is examined, there flow at its heart interlaced streams of conduct swollen with material constraints, social structures, changing inclinations, meteorological trends, rear derailleurs, human lungs, melting glaciers, scattered light. All this is involved in a "trend of conduct." It is the pith of social change.

than formulating a thin and timeless maxim, as in, e.g., certain negative-freedom accounts that identify freedom with the absence of constraint[36] (as every Libertarian knows, you are never more free than when fired into the vacuum of space). Dewey emphasizes "a common-sense practical belief in freedom" as an effective way of realizing a substantive, responsive flexibility for navigating and growing within the world: "what men actually cherish under the name of freedom," he writes, "is that power of varied and flexible growth, of change of disposition of character."[37] Freedom's flexibility is crucial not only because humans must constantly respond to a changing world, but also because of its recursive qualities: flexibility means being able to evaluate information and make choices that deepen and extend one's future ability to evaluate information and make choices.[38] Freedom involves the constant moving uptake, repurposing, and plasticizing of disparate resources, strategies, tools.[39] This is impossible without a flexible approach not only to social-scientific inquiry, but also to

[36] Sometimes literally: "For whatsoever is so tied, or environed, as it cannot move within a certain space, which space is determined by the opposition of some external body, we say it hath not liberty to go further. And so of all living creatures, whilst they are imprisoned, or restrained, with walls, or chains; and of the water whilst it is kept in by banks, or vessels that otherwise would spread itself into a larger space, we use to say, that they are not at liberty, to move in such manner, as without those external impediments they would." See Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Edwin Curley (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994), 136.

[37] Dewey, "Freedom," 313. "Men" *sic*.

[38] Ibid., 311-14.

[39] Ibid., 314.

everyday conduct and situational judgments. As Shulamith Firestone writes, "The most important characteristic to be maintained in any revolution is *flexibility*."[40]

Pragmatism is consilient. Consilience refers to the convergence of evidence from different sources, some of which are spotty and none of which is definitive, toward an improved way of understanding.[41] Two important features of consilience surface in Dewey: no one source of evidence, reason, or line of argument is definitive (in fact, the quest for definitiveness is a red herring) and heterogeneous forms of evidence, produced by diverse means of verification, observation, testing, and judgment, guide outcomes. Different forms of evidence "mutually reinforce" one another, producing dappled solutions.[42] Dewey argues that "seemingly incoherent and disconnected facts are brought together" so as to determine which conceptions are best "at clarifying dark spots, untying hard knots," irrespective of which ideas appear best "in the abstract."[43] This evidential pluralism contributes to pragmatism's ability to offer guidance in complex situations without sclerotic formalization, cheap shortcuts, or abstractions that only shift problems to higher levels of generality. Deweyan consilience works to loosen the Gordian knot from different angles rather than purporting to cut it with one sudden stroke.

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[40] Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1970), 257.

[41] Occasionally, as in E. O. Wilson's *Consilience*, consilience is associated with convergence toward a something like universal truth. I do not take this view.

[42] Hugh McDonald, *John Dewey and Environmental Philosophy* (Albany: SUNY, 2004), 119.

[43] Dewey, *Essential Dewey*, vol. 2, 146-47.

Pragmatism is holistic.[44] Dewey's holism is well-documented. Hugh McDonald, discussing a Deweyan approach to moral decisions in an ecological context, writes that "Dewey is holistic and no one element is more important than the whole web of relations in moral deliberation."[45] Dewey's holism helps his flexible, plastic method avoid slipping into an ad hocery that floats free of structural elements or considerations of value: "Dewey is careful to relate these [elements of moral deliberation] to one another in a mutually reinforcing way. Thus circumstances are not the ultimate test, for their resolution is in terms of a positive direction of change, which includes both values, inclusive, overall goods, and reference to consequences…. Moral activities are incorporated into the overall activity of the organism."[46] The literature on ecology and pragmatism highlights the ways that Dewey's holism extends to his understanding of ethical judgment and to his naturalism. A moral judgment, for Dewey, convokes rules, ends, means, outcomes, context, and character. These together guide moral action. Where consequentialist theories of morality prize the outcome of a given action, deontological accounts examine an act's relationship with a duty or law, and virtue ethics emphasize the development of moral character, Dewey holds that no type of moral claim prevails on its own. But none is discarded, either. The values you or I associate with different actions, to take one example, weigh on decision-making but do not determine it. Our

[44] For further discussion about the relationship between pragmatism and holism, see Richard Rorty and E. P. Ragg, "Worlds or Words Apart?" *Philosophy and Literature* 26, no. 2 (2002): 369-71.

[45] McDonald, *Environmental*, 119

[46] Ibid.

values enter into holistic, mutual exchanges with context, intention, consequences, and so forth.[47] This account of interlinked, plural sources for moral situations links up with Dewey's holistic naturalism in at least two ways.[48] First, Dewey maintains that moral claims and living cannot be separated: "moral values, regulations, principles and objects… are part and parcel of a normal development of a life process."[49] Second, and partly because of the connection between living and morality, the convocation of the components of a moral choice echoes Dewey's holistic account of organic existence in which "the whole organism is concerned in every act to some extent and in some fashion…. Since the total state of the organism is never exactly twice alike, in so far the phenomena of hunger and sex are never twice the same in fact."[50] This holism among diverse parts extends to the environment in which organisms act.[51] To isolate, decontextualize, or make singular any moral value, biological capability, or material fact is to neglect the holistic character of moral choices, environments, and organic life. Action, thought, and ethics are rooted in

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[47] John Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct* (New York: Carlton House, 1922), 39-41, 45-46, 48.

[48] Recall that Dewey's naturalism involves the non-reductive observation that to speak of human action is to speak of exchanges by organic entities in a natural context. Subject-object distinctions, for example, cannot be formulated in such a way as to ignore the mutually-constitutive relationship between an organism and its environment. No action, principle, or entity can be distinguished from its implication in different levels of naturalistic exchanges. See Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct*, 51-53; Richard J. Bernstein, "Dewey's Naturalism," *The Review of Metaphysics* 13, no. 2 (1959): 340-353.

[49] Dewey, *Conduct*, 184-85.

[50] Ibid., 149-51.

[51] Ibid., 150-151.

organic and moral contexts with which they make a whole and from which they cannot be separated.

Pragmatism is purposeful. Much of Dewey's work offers, as Richard Bernstein argues, "a cosmological vision of an open universe in which there is irreducible novelty, chance, and contingency."[52] How does Dewey balance his inclination toward an open universe with his endorsement of the capacity, in humans, for considered action in service of social transformation? Democratic purposiveness and open-universe cosmologies aren't baldy incompatible, of course, but neither do they fit together seamlessly.[53] Dewey's sense of melioristic purpose doesn't break from his view of a universe in flux, but instead imposes a transient, ad-hoc, recursive ordering within an open-universe conceptual frame. Dewey's sense of stick-to-itiveness is not best understood as a slip into credulity or technocracy. Instead, Dewey's purposiveness is inseparable from and made possible by his emphasis on a dynamic world that is underdetermined but not devoid of patterns. There remains space in the cosmos for human purpose as a practice of navigation. The ongoing and imperfect attempt to act intelligently within the world derives its importance in large part from

[52] Richard Bernstein, "The Resurgence of Pragmatism," *Social Research* 59 (1992): 814. See also John Dewey, "The Development of American Pragmatism," in *The Essential Dewey: Pragmatism, Education, Democracy*, vol. 1, ed. Larry Hickman and Thomas Alexander (Indianapolis: Indiana, 1998), 6.

[53] Witness as one attempt to make them fit Richard Rorty's infamous public liberal/private ironist distinction, in which educated democrats read Nietzsche at home and forget him when they go to the polls. See Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

the fact that the world evades attempts to anatomize it. Actions matter.[54] The concrete effects of a given action make a difference to the whole and must be taken into account in any further attempt to alter the scene and its effects. Considered action is "distinctively moral" in large part because it is possible to make better or worse decisions about what to do.[55] Moreover, it is possible to take action that strengthens or destroys the capacity to formulate and discern better or worse courses of action to begin with.

Pragmatism is forward-looking. This characteristic follows closely from the point about the possibility of making better and worse decisions. Dewey argues that "instead of saying that a man requires a motive in order to induce him to act, we should say that when a man is going to act he needs to know *what* he is going to do—what the quality of his act is in terms of consequences to follow…. [That is, a] forward-looking reference to results."[56] Dewey departs from viewing action as having psychological or metaphysical priors like "motive" from which it retroactively draws impetus, meaning, and justification. Instead, actions are taken with reference to their effect on the future: a "forward-looking reference to results." If "motive" coheres, it is because it accretes forward, through action and decision-making, not because it

[54] Dewey, *Conduct*, 278-79.

[55] Ibid.

[56] Ibid., 121. "Man" *sic.*

preexists them.[57] Dewey's example here is quotidian, but the pragmatic emphasis on looking forward extends beyond this everyday sense. A social theorist with this forward-looking approach, for example, is primarily interested in interventions into the history of philosophy and social theory insofar as they change the resources available for understanding present conditions and working toward more favorable futures.

Pragmatism is reconstructive and resource-sensitive. Dewey's reconstructive approach draws on the historical, material, social conditions assembled by prior events to transform a given situation or state of affairs going forward.[58] "Transform" is characteristically context-dependent, referring to the holistic moral dimensions at play and the resources available for changing a given situation. "Situation" and "state of affairs" are similarly contingent, referring as they do to the interacting material factors, social conditions, actants, values, and so on that grow and sustain the problems you confront and the milieux in which you confront them. Dewey points out that what's available (psychologically, technologically, culturally) in a given situation for handling a problem matters. Reconstruction means resituating, deforming, shuffling, and reinterpreting present material, social, historical, and intellectual circumstances so as to engender better rather than worse outcomes. It

[57] Ibid., 122-3.

[58] For a related treatment of reconstruction in Dewey's thought, see Colin Koopman, "Genealogical Pragmatism: How History Matters for Foucault and Dewey," *Journal of the Philosophy of History* 5 (2011): 546.

means disconnecting certain feedback loops and building in new ones. "Concrete suggestions arising from past experiences," Dewey (picking up steam) writes, "developed and matured in the light of the needs and deficiencies of the present, employed as aims and methods of specific reconstruction, and tested by success or failure in accomplishing this task of readjustment, suffice."[59] Solutions, decision procedures, tools for understanding, and so on cannot be summoned whole-cloth, nor brought into existence by the sudden apprehension of truth, the sure application of rationality, or any approach deriving from radical disconnection from present conditions and resources.[60] To undertake a Deweyan approach to problems is to attend to and engage in detailed empirical and theoretical analyses of the situation at hand, its available resources, its obstructed routes. No theory of politics can spin frictionlessly, unencumbered by concrete situations.

A pragmatic meliorism emerges from these characteristics. It is crucial to distinguish meliorism from optimism. Though Dewey stands accused of inveterate optimism, his orientation is different. Optimism, at its weakest, connotes an inclination toward viewing the world favorably and, at its strongest, the Panglossian insistence that you

[59] John Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (New York: Henry Holt, 1920), 95-96.

[60] See §2.1.

live and act in "the best of all possible worlds."[61] Meliorism's claim is narrower. Dewey writes that "if we form general ideas and if we put them in action, consequences are produced which could not be produced otherwise. Under these conditions the world will be different from what it would have been if thought had not intervened. This consideration confirms the human and moral importance of thought and its reflective operation in experience."[62] For Dewey, this point, which authorizes a species of meliorism, extends beyond "reason, thought and knowledge" and into the many interconnected constituents of action.[63] A meliorist argues that a given condition can usually be better or worse, relatively speaking, and that a given action can make that condition better or worse. The skeptic objects that circumstances exceed my control: I can sometimes know what I do, but not what I do does, to paraphrase Foucault. Any action I take is caught up in a set of material, natural, and historical forces that deform my intentions. However, the fact that actions become involved in a set of effects beyond them is not sufficient to damn action generally.[64] On the contrary, the difficulty and complexity of action only

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[61] Voltaire, *Candide* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001); Gottfried Leibniz, *Théodicée* (New York: Routledge, 1951), 288.

[62] John Dewey, "American Pragmatism," 8-9. In this passage, Dewey is defending William James from the charge that James's work has no place for thought.

[63] Ibid.

[64] For Dewey, acting despite this knowledge involves a kind of "humility," that is, "the sense of our slight inability even with our best intelligence and effort to command events; a sense of our dependence on forces that go their way without our wish and plan. Its purport is not to relax effort but to make us prize every opportunity." We do not act *despite* the knowledge that our actions are beset by difficulty. We act *via* that knowledge. See Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct*, 289-291.

reinforces the necessity of critical consideration and attentiveness on my part.[65] Such attentiveness is indispensable to the melioristic work pragmatism urges.

§1.3 Dewey's shortcomings

The foregoing discussion of the central traits of Deweyan pragmatism is doubly positive: it describes plans for action and it's upbeat. Although there is an awareness of how available resources limit meliorist projects, and Dewey acknowledges that to argue that things could be better means taking seriously the prospect that they could be worse, the tone of much of Dewey's work is confident about the power of human ingenuity and rationality to address problems. At the same time, unequal power relations make little appearance in Dewey's account.

The pragmatism described above tends to imagine those who engage in meliorative work as coming to problems with a standard, freely-available set of capabilities, like someone trying to open a pickle jar who has ten healthy fingers, running water, a kitchen drawer full of rubber jar openers. Material, emotional, bodily, historical, and nutritional preconditions have to be in place for Dewey's reconstructive meliorism to be thinkable, let alone functional.[66] Moreover, the problems pragmatism confronts

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[65] Ibid.

[66] Dewey himself levels a version of this charge against "classic Liberalism" and negative conceptions of freedom. See Dewey, *Essential Dewey*, vol. 2, 305-308.

are never fully exterior to those who wish to solve them, and Dewey gives insufficient attention to this, though he does give some.[67] They contain vicious recursive[68] dimensions: too often the stuck pickle jar turns out to be in some way constitutive of who you are and your capability to loosen anything.

To be fair, Dewey does give an involved account of the way that personal development, education, and experience contribute to the making and remaking of a self capable of meliorative work.[69] He argues that

> in order that education of the young be efficacious in inducing an improved society, it is not necessary for adults to have a formulated definite ideal of some better state. An educational enterprise conducted in this spirit would probably end merely in substituting one rigidity for another. What is necessary is that habits be formed which are more intelligent, more sensitively percipient, more informed with foresight, more aware of what they are about, more direct and sincere, more flexibly responsive than those now current. Then they will meet their own problems and propose their own improvements.[70]

Dewey further notes that "educative development of the young is not the only way in which the life of impulse may be employed to effect social ameliorations…. No adult

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[67] E.g., "Courses of action which put the blame exclusively on a person as if his evil will were the sole cause of wrong-doing and those which condone offense on account of the share of social conditions in producing bad disposition, are equally ways of making an unreal separation of man from his surroundings, mind from the world…. Our entire tradition regarding punitive justice tends to prevent recognition of social partnership in producing crime" (Dewey, *Conduct*, 17-19).

[68] A commodius vicus of recirculation, even. See James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* (New York: Penguin, 1999), 1.

[69] John Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct*, 16-18, 121-122, 128-130.

[70] Ibid., 16-17, 128.

environment is all of one piece. The more complex a culture is, the more certain it is to include habits formed on differing, even conflicting patterns. Each custom may be rigid, unintelligent in itself, and yet this rigidity may cause it to wear upon others. The resulting attrition may release impulse for new adventures."[71] Even if, however, Dewey offers tools for addressing problems of recursivity, and helps to dissolve the overly sharp distinction between problems and solvers that pervades my earlier discussion, he still lacks a sophisticated account of power *as domination*. Moreover, he neglects the relationship between power as capacity and power as domination. Do asymmetric relations of power result in the uneven distribution of reconstructive capacities across populations? If I can't eat tonight, does it matter much whether I should take a meliorist or impossibilist approach to social problems? If the formative event of my childhood was to be priced and sold, how does this affect my capacity to develop something called a "self" capable of reconstructive melioration? If I'm taught from an early age to describe myself as an I—to the extent that I look in the blue-eyed mirror at eight and think "I'm an individual" as naturally as I'd think "snow is white"—does that carve out a space in me for the disposition to one day dissolve the structures of power that individuated that eight-year-old, or does this fact render the attempt to loosen those structures only an act, a surface play that leaves depths untouched?

[71] Ibid., 128-129.

It's not clear how pragmatism answers questions of domination and unequal degrees of social power. Commenters have indicted pragmatism, and Dewey specifically, for being "unsuspicious of structures of power,"[72] having no account of power at all, or offering strategies that are open to cooptation by dominant groups.[73] We can understand the weight of these charges by critically discussing a few of the characteristics of Deweyan pragmatism put forward in the preceding section.

In the passage on Deweyan flexibility, I argued that Dewey puts forward responsive flexibility as a central practice for navigating political and ethical situations. Dewey holds that the valuable core of the too-abstract term "freedom" is "that power of varied and flexible growth, of change of disposition and character, that springs from intelligent choice."[74] Varied and flexible growth constitutes a "sound base for the common-sense practical belief in freedom."[75] Dewey expands this point when, defending pragmatism from the charge that it ratifies dominant interests, he writes that "the function of mind is to project new and more complex ends—to free experience from routine and from caprice. Not… to accomplish purposes already

[72] Stephen K. White, "The Very Idea of a Critical Social Science: A Pragmatist Turn," in *Cambridge Companion to Critical Theory*, ed. Fred Rush (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 313-15.

[73] R.W. Hildreth, "Reconstructing Dewey on Power," *Political Theory* 37, no. 6 (2009): 781.

[74] Dewey, "Freedom," 313.

[75] Ibid.

given."[76] Dewey parries the charges being made against him by insisting that pragmatic freedom involves not only the invention of new means (which, critics maintained, could be put to any purpose), but also the ongoing creation of new ends. However, Dewey's defense overestimates the independence, robustness, and neutrality of the processes for creating means and ends alike. He gives a sophisticated account of power as positive capacity, but overlooks the role played by power as domination.[77] The capabilities, identities, and self-understandings that the critical, flexible freedom described above attaches to are unevenly distributed across populations. In many cases, these capabilities are actively blocked. Bodies think and act through different subjectivities as different locations, healths, economic situations, moods, and actor-networks move through them.[78] Moreover, many of the capabilities Dewey endorses are implicated at their deepest levels with unequal structures of power. Dewey imagines a listener who, via pragmatism, becomes "more thoughtful; more cognizant of possible alternatives… thereby rendering his future choices more varied, flexible, and apt."[79] Yet, this deepening of a listener's capacity for intelligent action does not occur in a neutral medium. A body comes to posses the capacity to

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[76] John Dewey, "The Need for a Recovery of Philosophy," in *Creative Intelligence: Essays in the Pragmatic Attitude*, ed. John Dewey (New York: Holt, 1917), 63.

[77] For an overview and critique of the extensive literature on the difference between power as capacity and power as domination (sometimes "power-to" versus "power-over"), see Michael Karlberg, "The Power of Discourse and the Discourse of Power," *International Journal of Peace Studies* 10, no. 1 (2005).

[78] See, as one example, Jane Bennett's ecological reading of *The Public and its Problems* in *Vibrant Matter* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 100-102.

[79] Dewey, "Freedom," 313.

do meliorative work only within and via specific conditions of subjectivation. Everyday examples of this point abound: the fact that I understand myself as an "I" stems from certain relays, experiences, and power differentials, and reproduces them in turn.[80] Because the shifting agencies and self-understandings that make possible the action a body takes are enmeshed in historical, material, and social contexts, any attempt at melioristic work is capillarized head-to-foot by power relations. Dewey's account of how capacities like "intelligent action" or "flexible freedom" are cultivated in subjects neglects the constitutive role power—as both capacity and domination—plays in this process.[81]

Dewey's effort to fold different constituencies, life-worlds, and actors into a holistically-understood social whole[82] is susceptible to the objection that there may be compelling reasons to draw hard distinctions across the social field. Joel Olson, following W.E.B. Du Bois, understands the social order in the United States not as a pluralist whole but as "two worlds cut by a color line."[83] To recognize this split between "two principal racial categories, white and non-white" is to better "pinpoint

[80] The "I" you understand yourself to be shifts in mundane circumstances, too. If you have worked a service job, you know intuitively the difference between helping a customer on your first day, your last day, when you're on break, when you're two minutes to closing, when you have a stomach virus but know you'd better not call in sick.

[81] For an account of the human-centered nature of Dewey's account, see Bennett, *Vibrant*, 102-103.

[82] John Dewey, "Psychology and Social Practice," *Psychological Review* 7 (1900): 123; Dewey, *Essential Dewey*, vol. 2, 349-350; Gary A. Cook, "George Herbert Mead" in *A Companion to Pragmatism*, ed. John R. Shook and Joseph Margolis (Hoboken: John Wiley and Sons, 2008), 76.

[83] Joel Olson, *The Abolition of White Democracy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 3.

the locus of political tensions" and to account for the "conflict, power, and alienation at the heart of the racial order."[84] Dualisms are analytically and politically powerful: "In explaining how one category defines the other, dualisms emphasize social relations and the role of power and conflict in them. This emphasis is not always found in models of difference or pluralism, given their tendency toward tolerance of different positions."[85]

Olson reveals how a focus on structures of domination challenges Dewey's holism and sense of community. A pluralist holism is all well and good if one is inclined to tolerate the various viewpoints, constituencies, life-worlds, and value systems that are to be assimilated into the whole. In reality, this assimilation risks paving over smoldering histories of violence and division. These histories matter because they structure relations of domination and exploitation in the present. Dewey's assimilation, if it is insufficiently attentive to histories of domination, risks reiterating structures and ways of understanding that perpetuate domination and exploitation. The risk of uncritically repeating exploitative gestures in the name of pluralist holism threatens to fracture Dewey's vision of different constituencies "in harmony with the interests and goods which are common."[86] James Baldwin expresses this worry from a different perspective when he asks, "Do I really want to be integrated into a

[84] Ibid., 25-26.

[85] Ibid., 25.

[86] John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems* (Athens, OH: Swallow Press, 1954), 147.

burning house?"[87] The social order is fraught with "conflict, power, and alienation," not just as lesions to be cleanly excised, but as constitutive and constantly-metastasizing elements of social life.[88] To recommend, as Dewey does, "better education"[89] as a way of combatting entrenched racism risks missing how the categories and assumptions (what education is "for," how it should be undertaken, how a person can be "well-educated") that injunction relies upon are themselves forged and sustained by racial hierarchies.[90] A social theory without a strong sense of domination, violence, and division risks acquiescing to or repeating the same.

For Dewey, "concrete suggestions arising from past experiences, developed and matured in the light of the needs and deficiencies of the present, employed as aims and methods of specific reconstruction, and tested by success or failure in accomplishing this task of readjustment, suffice."[91] But Dewey does not adequately acknowledge the possibility that the "concrete suggestions" of past experience are not illuminated by the light "of the needs and deficient of the present." Too often, what

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[87] James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* (New York: Dial Press, 1963), 108. (Echoing, of course, Martin Luther King, Jr.)

[88] Olson, *Abolition*, 26.

[89] John Dewey, *The Middle Works of John Dewey*, vol. 7, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1979), 339-40.

[90] For a critical evaluation of Dewey's educational prescriptions with respect to race, see Frank Margonis, "John Dewey's Racialized Visions," *Educational Theory* 59, no. 1 (2009): 17–39. Stefan Neubert responds to Margonis in "Democracy and Education in the Twenty-First Century: Deweyan Pragmatism and the Question of Racism," *Educational Theory* 60, no. 4 (2010): 487–502.

[91] John Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (New York: Henry Holt, 1920), 95-96.

are understood to be the needs of the present are manipulated, played for shadows and false depths.[92] History, too, does not offer unambiguous lessons. It accretes in the present, a rolling lightshow of smoke and violence. Dewey's process of self-correction is fragile and contingent. Worse still, self-correction isn't vexed by well-identified malefactors. Procedures, relays, and feedback loops flowing through psychic and hylic systems scramble the prospect of clearly evaluating success and failure. Too often the reflective equilibrium between a conceptual approach and concrete problems is not "tested by success or failure" the way Dewey imagines. More often, actions aimed at transforming social conditions succeed or fail for reasons unconnected to fungible or well-understood criteria for success. The counter-criteria at play can be actively hostile to what Dewey understands as "success." Many rationalities operate through history besides a humble, pragmatic meliorism. Structures of domination can have their deepest roots in the "commonsense" notions that Dewey celebrates. Dewey's melioristic pragmatism fails time and again to account for the depth, tenacity, and flexibility of power relations.

[92] For criticism of Dewey along these lines, see Max Horkheimer, *The Eclipse of Reason* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 36-37.

§1.4 Responses internal to Dewey

Are there Deweyan resources for responding to Dewey's limitations and oversights? I am sympathetic to applying Dewey's reconstructive meliorism to his own work, a task of which he'd approve. This undertaking has the additional benefit of highlighting sophisticated features of Dewey's thought that are often overlooked.

In recent years, R.W. Hildreth and Joel Wolfe have undertaken the project of finding and developing an account of power relations within Dewey's work. Hildreth argues that "we can find critical traction and normative standards…. [to establish] the ability of Dewey's pragmatism to address power relations and political conflict precisely within Dewey's conception of experience."[93] Hildreth rereads central Deweyan concepts like experience and inquiry as involving currents of power that are "enacted through experience… every experience is itself situated and structured by a complex transactional field of forces."[94] The power Hildreth reads into Dewey appears "as a dynamic, fluid, and relational field of forces."[95] He writes that Dewey shows us how "power relations constitute individuals."[96]

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[93] Hildreth, "Reconstructing Dewey," 786.

[94] Ibid., 790.

[95] Ibid.

[96] Ibid., 794.

These formulations of power as a relational field and as productive of subjects are canonical Foucauldian formulations. Herein lies the difficulty with Hildreth's reconstruction. Hildreth argues that we do not need to venture beyond Dewey to find a more sophisticated account of power, citing Foucault as a thinker whom he does not intend to visit.[97] Yet, when Hildreth draws an account of power from Dewey, his argument reads as if someone had combined Dewey and Foucault then deleted the Foucault citations.[98] The reading, e.g., that Dewey demonstrates how "power relations constitute individuals" scans like a clear importation of Foucault, but one of Hildreth's central points is that the resources for this argument come from Dewey. Is Hildreth's implicit claim that it's unnecessary to refer to Foucault because a notion like "power is productive of subjects" now circulates freely enough that it retroactively activates certain ideas in Dewey? But even this claim relies obliquely on Foucault.

Joel Wolfe takes a similar textual route to finding an "indirect, intrinsic or transactional account" of power in Dewey.[99] He describes how Dewey "provides a theory of praxis that is in essence a tacit theory of power."[100] On Wolfe's account, "Dewey's philosophical starting point centers on praxis and the ways human action

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[97] Ibid., 782.

[98] Save the recognition, on 793, that "here Dewey is closer to the work of Michel Foucault."

[99] Joel Wolfe, "Does Pragmatism Have a Theory of Power?" *European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy* 4 (2009): 121.

[100] Ibid.

makes differences within and through a social medium" in such a way as to "in effect" offer "a tacit theory of power."[101] But offering an account of habit/practice/inquiry that is sensitive, embedded, and interested in the constituents and consequences of human action is not the same as offering an account of power relations. Both Hildreth and Wolfe run into this problem. Wolfe macerates the issue with careful phrasing in which Dewey offers "in effect" a "tacit" theory of power. Hildreth solves the problem by attributing crypto-Foucauldian formulations to Dewey, turning him into a kind of Foucauldian *avant la lettre*.

I find both of these arguments substantially correct. Wolfe is right: Dewey describes the social order and social actors in such a way as to tacitly involve himself in what are now broadly understood to be questions about power relations. Hildreth is right: Dewey's work substantially agrees with what are today canonical Foucauldian formulations. Neither Wolfe nor Hildreth offers a distinctly Deweyan theory of power, however. They offer, instead, something quite valuable: sites in Dewey's thought where a robust account of power can attach. A hinge, of sorts, that will come into play later.[102]

[101] Ibid., 124.

[102] See §2.1.4.

§1.5 Bringing in Foucault: Stuhr and Koopman

This project joins other attempts to put John Dewey and Michel Foucault into conversation, of which there are too few. The two most important thinkers in this area are John Stuhr and Colin Koopman. In what follows I suggest how my project joins and departs from theirs.

Stuhr combines Dewey and Foucault under the rubric of "genealogical pragmatism," a "pragmatism that takes seriously the temperament of postmodernism, a genealogy that takes seriously the temperament of pragmatism."[103] For Stuhr, genealogical pragmatism is "a pragmatism that disrupts, 'eventalizes,' and problematizes. It is also a pragmatism that suspects itself, that critically inspects its own methods, including logic and science."[104] Stuhr emphasizes the meta-methodological capability of genealogical pragmatism to "attend to the difference and oppositionalities" that define it as an intellectual practice.[105] This attention to difference, Stuhr notes, heightens awareness of "issues of race, ethnicity, gender, age, class, sexual orientation,

[103] John Stuhr, *Genealogical Pragmatism* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1997), 89. The practice of grouping the differences between pragmatism and postructuralism under different "temperaments" also appears in Rorty and Koopman (e.g., Rorty understands the central issue between Dewey and Foucault as a choice between pragmatism's sunny disposition and postmodernism's suspicious, moody skulking. See Richard Rorty, "Method, Social Science, and Social Hope," in *Consequences of Pragmatism* [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982]). *Q.v.* also note 113.

[104] Ibid., 112.

[105] Ibid., 113.

body."[106] Stuhr does not develop the point further, however. What is the relationship between a self-aware methodological approach and the specific structures of domination Stuhr points to?

Stuhr's genealogical pragmatism has been taken up in the past two decades by Colin Koopman. Koopman argues that "pragmatism and genealogy stand in need of one another. Any full-scale practice of critical inquiry requires the fulfillment of both intellectual desiderata of reconstruction and problematization—hence critical inquiry itself calls for something like pragmatism that provides a reconstructive service as well as something like genealogy that performs a diagnostic service. To perform only one of these services is to chagrin the responsibilities we have assumed in embracing the task of thought as work. We must kick up the dust, and then work to settle it again."[107] Koopman emphasizes the transitional-meliorative potential of pragmatism and genealogy: the idea that pragmatism and genealogy work like a road crew, with genealogy jackhammering old ways of thinking and pragmatism laying fresh asphalt.[108]

To this end, Koopman argues that Foucault doesn't practice genealogy simply to demonstrate that present practices are wicked (as Nancy Fraser and others have

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[106] Ibid.

[107] Colin Koopman, "Foucault and Pragmatism: Introductory Notes on Metaphilosophical Methodology," *Foucault Studies*, no. 11 (2011): 6.

[108] Colin Koopman, *Pragmatism as Transition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009); Koopman, *Genealogy*, 23, 133-36.

argued),[109] but to show what these practices are made up of and to offer avenues for dissolving them by reconstructing the constituents and feedback loops that genealogy allows one to better see.[110] Genealogy, for Koopman, is diagnostic. It helps you discover what's wrong and how. Pragmatism, on the other hand, offers tools for treatment. Koopman repeatedly distinguishes between Foucault as observer and Dewey as doer. This distinction can be understood by examining how Koopman rearticulates Stuhr's "genealogical pragmatism." Genealogical pragmatism is primarily a methodological and epistemological project. Its potential lies in "providing contemporary philosophy a forward motion and momentum."[111] Koopman writes that "genealogy, pragmatism, and critical theory offer a turning of philosophy…. To thusly renew philosophy… we will have to muster the courage to confront a set of entrenched assumptions about ourselves as philosophers and critical inquirers."[112] It is philosophy that must be renewed, refreshed, and rendered more perceptive. The relationship between this philosophical renewal and politics is not clear.[113] For example, Koopman does not fully explain the normative stakes of genealogical

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[109] Nancy Fraser, "Foucault on Modern Power," *PRAXIS International* 3 (1981): 272-287; Colin Koopman, *Genealogy*, 88.

[110] Koopman, *Genealogy*, 89-91, 212-14.

[111] Ibid., 346.

[112] Ibid., 269-70. *Sic.*

[113] Koopman offers one chapter on political theory proper in *Pragmatism as Transition*. He criticizes liberal/Kantian/Rawlsian political theory as "utopian" and neo-Nietzschean/Francophone theory as "dystopian" before setting up his variety of transitional pragmatism as a third-way option. His analysis remains mostly methodological in character. See Koopman, *Pragmatism*, 157-64. *Q.v.* also note 103.

pragmatism. Koopman writes that this is not because politically-oriented work is "secondary in relation to clarifying… methodological issues," but because he hopes that "methodological clarification can in some way assist the practices of critical cultural philosophy already under way."[114] A great deal hinges on this "in some way."[115]

Foucault and Deleuze's remarks on the place and function of theory show just how complicated the relationship between practice, theory, and methodology can be, and consequently how much is packed into Koopman's claim that "methodological clarification can in some way assist the practices of critical cultural philosophy."[116] Koopman writes that methodological clarification supports "practices of critical cultural philosophy," which practices further assume a supporting or clarifying role with respect to politics. Koopman's understanding of the relations between methodological work, cultural philosophy, and politics invites questions about how genealogical pragmatism transmits itself between these zones: is genealogical pragmatism confined to methodological clarification? if it moves beyond methodology, how do its aims and functions change as it filters into more engaged "cultural critical philosophy"? does it filter all the way to politics as it's practiced day to day? what would it mean for a theory like genealogical pragmatism to be operative

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[114] Ibid.

[115] See, e.g., Foucault and Deleuze, "Intellectuals and Power," 207-208.

[116] Ibid.

in "politics day to day"? is the idea of a theory operative in everyday practice, an "active theory," a contradiction in terms? to what extent does the language of a theory "filtering" into the world misstate the process? should Koopman's levels (methodological clarification to cultural critical philosophy to concrete politics) be understood as sealed, autonomous layers or as porous zones of thought, comportment, and action? does genealogical pragmatism dissolve the borders between the levels that it traverses? Finally, how does genealogical pragmatism address itself to politics? Recall Foucault's remark that "the intellectual's role is no longer to place himself 'somewhat ahead and to the side'… rather, it is to struggle against the forms of power that transform him into its object and instrument in the sphere of 'knowledge,' 'truth,' 'consciousness,' and 'discourse.'"[117] Foucault's statement contains elements consonant with genealogical pragmatism and elements inimical to it. Congenial to genealogical pragmatism is the idea that by being more critical, more genealogical, about the methodology of philosophical inquiry, a philosopher is better able to resist "the forms of power that transform him into its object and instrument in the sphere of 'knowledge,'" truth, and so on.[118] Genealogy "makes facile gestures difficult" by giving a history to what appeared ahistorical, a temporality to what seemed timeless.[119] The difficulties introduced by genealogical

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[117] Foucault and Deleuze, "Intellectuals and Power," 207-208.

[118] Ibid.

[119] Michel Foucault, "Practicing Criticism," in *Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and Other Writings 1977-1984*, ed. Lawrence D. Kritzman, trans. Alan Sheridan et al. (New York: Routledge, 1988), 154-55.

analysis can disrupt the process whereby a thinker becomes an instrument of knowledge.

Genealogical pragmatism has a more ambiguous relationship with Foucault's remark that theory is not best placed "'ahead and to the side,'" that is, in an epistemological clearing from which the theorist can better see society, history, and so on. One of the ways genealogical pragmatism does what Koopman (and Stuhr) hope it can do (realize a newly self-reflexive methodology for philosophy) is by interrogating power mechanisms at the heart of the process by which intellectuals become the "object[s] and instrument[s]" of knowledge. Koopman's analysis belies the degree to which genealogical pragmatism must involve an interrogation of power relations and, by extension, concrete political questions and sites of contestation. By stopping short of politics, Koopman's methodological clearing leaves genealogical pragmatism open to the familiar charge that it is dangerously indeterminate in political and ethical content.

It remains unclear what guidance a combination of pragmatism and poststructuralism formulated to ameliorate epistemological dilemmas or methodological barrenness can offer politics.[120] Stuhr and Koopman are philosophy professors using genealogy and pragmatism to deal with what each sees as certain roadblocks within philosophy.[121]

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[120] For a discussion about the fraught nature of trying to extract programmatic methodological statements from Foucault, see Samuel A. Chambers, "Foucault's Evasive Maneuvers," *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities* 6, no. 3 (2001): 104-108.

[121] See Stuhr, *Genealogical Pragmatism*, 3, and this parable given by Koopman about "the past, current, and possible future state of professional academic philosophy":

But Deweyan reconstruction (as both Stuhr and Koopman know) is not only for methodological problems.[122] There is little discussion of why Stuhr and Koopman need Foucault to do genealogical pragmatism. Generally, Stuhr and Koopman's story is that "we" (philosophy professors? antiracists? leftists? democrats? Democrats?) require Foucault to better understand the histories of present conditions, the way that the constituents of a given situation are themselves constituted and contingent rather than neutral or natural. Genealogical work of this sort is not the heart of Foucault's contribution to pragmatism. Dewey lacks most acutely a sharp and sensitive approach to power relations. I believe Koopman and Stuhr intend power to be folded in, in

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> Camps of philosophers cordon themselves off from one another by drawing lines in the still sands of a breezeless desert…. They forget about the philosophers on the other side of the line, and when the occasional hawkeyed upstart or pesky defector announces the existence of a seeming country of philosophers not too far away, they retort that those on the other side of the line are not 'real' philosophers…. After a generation or two, nobody remembers why the line was drawn, or what function it serves. But it is defended as vigorously as ever. Sometime soon thereafter, newly-indoctrinated apprentices begin asking questions that those keeping the line can barely comprehend, let alone answer. "Why don't we read Deleuze here? Have you read him? He's really interesting to me. And what about Foucault?" "Why do you insist that Quine is dry and unimportant? Have you read him? He's really quite interesting to me. And what about Dewey?" Soon the line-keepers abandon their fortifications, but of course nearly everyone continues to talk only to those philosophers in their immediate proximity. The apprentices, meanwhile, begin building bridges over the lines in the sand. Even though they are but thin lines in a breezeless desert, nobody knows how to cross over them… the only way the apprentices can manage to muster a conversation is to carefully artifice means of passage from one camp to the other. These bridges, sometimes quite garish constructions, mediate…. Eventually, it is hoped, the bridges will begin to seem unnecessary, and philosophers will effortlessly walk across those tiny little lines, eventually rubbing them out with their footprints, as they stare up in wonder at the spectacular sculptures above that stand as a memorial to a not-too-distant time when all philosophers were afraid to walk paths that are now frequently trod by just about everyone.

(See Colin Koopman, "Foucault and Pragmatism," 4-5.)

[122] For an account of why the same goes for Foucault (i.e., why Foucaultian genealogy is also not only for methodological problems), see Chambers, "Evasive Maneuvers," 104-117.

some way, with the word "genealogical." Genealogies can be used to show how a concept or practice is inflected with power and not natural or neutral. But Koopman and Stuhr leave this point underexplored. As long as Foucault's contribution to Dewey is understood as primarily methodological, it fails to exploit the promise of power pragmatism to contribute to more egalitarian futures.

This methodological-epistemological focus is partly disciplinary. Stuhr and Koopman are philosophers, not political theorists. But my project is to see what pragmatism looks like when directed toward a concrete political context.

The existing literature would also benefit from a more nuts-and-bolts account of how Foucault and Dewey overlap and conflict, where the joints of power pragmatism articulate. Koopman does distinguish between Foucauldian problematization as "an act of critical inquiry" and as "a nominal object of inquiry" (e.g., the difference between "let's problematize that" and "the carceral problematization uses discipline in this way"), but he does not connect Foucault to Dewey, or either of them to political problems.[123]

The nature of the attachment between Dewey and Foucault, along with the way their combination touches concrete political questions, remains unclear in Koopman's and

[123] Koopman, *Genealogy*, 98-99.

Stuhr's work. In chapter two, I discuss Dewey and Foucault's connections across four areas (purity, tragedy, science, and power). In chapters three and four, I explore the political implications of power pragmatism with respect to Shulamith Firestone's attempt to regender social relations and contemporary theorists' efforts to render plausible a postcapitalist world.

§1.6 Bridge to chapter two

I have given a preliminary account of why Dewey's pragmatism ought to catch the eye of political theorists who are interested in tackling political and social problems, and why pragmatism stumbles when it fails to attend to power differentials.

I have discussed several attempts to correct Dewey's failure to account for the ways that power as capacity and power as domination intermingle. One strategy mobilizes resources within Dewey to bring forward a theory of power relations. This sort of undertaking is valuable because it shows how and where a theory of power can attach to Dewey: the existing sensitivities, textual sockets, and loose wires that allow Dewey's thought to enter into feedback loops and new relations with other ways thinking about power. These attempts, however, fall short of their aim to offer a self-sufficiently Deweyan theory of power relations. They either smuggle in formulations external to Dewey or offer a cocoon instead of a butterfly.

I agree with Koopman and Stuhr that Foucault offers tools for pragmatism's reconstructive surgery. But I think that the project of renewing pragmatism by supplementing Dewey with Foucault is best pursued, and best avoids the charge of political and moral indeterminacy, when it affirms its political aims and values. The literature (and this project) stands in need of more elbow grease to show how Dewey and Foucault can be interwoven. The next chapter concerns this weaving.

Chapter two

§2.1 Developing power pragmatism

> I would encourage clinicians to always include a "reasons for living coping card" in the kit. The "reasons for living coping card" (RFL) is simply a list of reasons for living in written and accessible format. Identifying specific and multiple reasons for living helps undermine suicide intent, capitalizing on ambivalence about death that persists for the overwhelming majority of suicidal patients in active treatment.
>
> – M. David Rudd, "Brief Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Suicidality in Military Populations"

This chapter stages four encounters between Dewey and Foucault on the topics of purity and profundity (§2.1.1), tragedy (§2.1.2), the sciences (§2.1.3), and power (§2.1.4). Dewey and Foucault's skepticism about purity and profundity provides a roadmap for identifying and avoiding tropes in contemporary theory that lock criticism into a search for a point of refusal exterior to power—and into a sense of disappointment when such a point is not achieved, and bitterness toward efforts that are seen as insufficiently radical, compromised and compromising. Dewey and Foucault's tragic understanding of politics as involving urgent threats to survival and tradeoffs checks pragmatism, restrains it from slipping into mere incrementalism or the ratification of dominant interests. Foucault, in particular, mobilizes discourses he

is skeptical of (like rights-talk) in the face of concrete threats to human health and survival. Dewey and Foucault also think of science as a bundle of procedures and techniques that can be repurposed. This view lends itself to chapter three's exploration of Shulamith Firestone as a pragmatist who is sensitive to power relations and who seeks to repurpose the techniques and tools of the sciences toward ending domination based on sex. Several commenters have suggested that Dewey contains a freestanding theory of power. I argue that Dewey instead contains passages that, when combined with supplements from Foucault, can furnish a theory of power in pragmatism. Dewey's work requires a Foucauldian reworking in order to sensitize it to the fact that pragmatic proposals for altering a given situation occur within shifting fields of power.

As a way of further contextualizing and explaining the power pragmatist project, I close this chapter by discussing how power pragmatism relates to "realist" political theory and outlining the prospect of cognitive-behavioral political theory. Debates over realism in political theory raise questions about the relationship between theory and what goes on in the world. Questions about what sort of relationship theoretical projects assume with the world ought to be, I argue, central to theoretical practice. I suggest one way of answering this claim with cognitive-behavioral political theory. In much in the same way that political theory has imported "astrologically lush"[124] systems of abstraction from psychoanalytic theory, theorists should consider lifting

[124] Eve Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 23-24.

from cognitive-behavioral therapy an interest in thinking systemically and concretely about everyday procedures for survival.

§2.1.1 Pure and profound

Dewey and Foucault share a skepticism toward purity and profundity as methodological, epistemological, and political goals. Foucault, for his part, is skeptical about ways of practicing philosophy that understand themselves to be seeking, deep in the heart of texts, a revelatory flaw that forever exposes or compromises the philosophical enterprise of which they are a part. Dewey exercises caution around the capacity of "abstract formulas" to understand or pace social change. Specifically, he thinks that rigid theoretical formulations—he cites "orthodox Marxian" accounts—cannot account for the complex unfolding of actual life primarily because they are formulated with the purity of ideas set in relation to other ideas and because they seek to excavate profound truths about history and human nature instead of the contingent and quotidian combinations of desires, purposes, and action that shape societies.

Consider Foucault's responses to Jacques Derrida's criticisms of *History of Madness*. Although much of Foucault's final response is given over to close-reading a few lines in Descartes's *Meditations*, Foucault makes several remarks that relate to Derrida's philosophical and methodological orientation more broadly. Derrida had previously

performed his own close reading of three pages in *Madness* concerning an interpretation of Descartes (which interpretation Foucault later wrote that he should not have included at all, regretting that he had not been more consistent "in my casual indifference towards philosophy").[125] "Derrida," Foucault begins, "thinks he can capture the meaning of my book or its 'project' from three pages."[126] Derrida thinks he can do this, Foucault argues, because he operates under three postulates that structure philosophical inquiry in France at the time. First, Derrida "supposes… that all knowledge, or in an even broader sense all rational discourse, entertains a fundamental relation with philosophy…. To free the implicit philosophy of a discourse, to reveal its contradictions, its limits, or its naivety, is to operate *a fortiori* and by the shortest possible route a critique of all that is said within it."[127] Second, Derrida "supposes that one commits 'faults' of a singular nature… in relation to this philosophy, which eminently holds the 'law' of all discourse."[128] These errors, in Derrida's view, aren't "so much faults of logic or reasoning, which bring errors that might be isolated in a material fashion, but rather faults that are something like a blend of a Christian sin and a Freudian slip…. one single sin is enough to compromise a whole life."[129] There is no recovery from the sort of flaw that Derrida

125 Michel Foucault, "Reply to Derrida," in *History of Madness*, trans. Jonathan Murphy and Jean Khalfa (New York: Routledge, 2006), 578.

126 Ibid., 575.

127 Ibid., 576.

128 Ibid.

129 Ibid.

purports to uncover: "Because the fault against philosophy is close to the slip, it will be 'revelatory' in the same way: the smallest 'snag' will suffice for the whole apparatus to be laid bare."[130] Third, Derrida practices a philosophy that "is only the repetition of an origin that is more than originary, and which infinitely exceeds, in its retreat, anything that it could say in any of its historical discourses."[131]

For Foucault, purity and profundity operate as central coordinates in Derrida's conception of philosophy. Foucault writes that "it should now be clear why my book inevitably appeared quite exterior and superficial compared to the profound philosophical interiority of Derrida's work."[132] Derrida's three authorizing postulates—philosophical fundamentalism, telling errors, and a glimmering, retreating origin—install a drive for philosophical profundity at the heart of deconstruction. Texts are endowed with an inner essence rendered available for judgment by crucial flaws or slips. This inner essence is accessible via a system of inversions and counterinversions, unveiled by close-reading after close-reading, which disclose an essential relationship between a text and the philosophical apparatus used to read it. Foucault, by contrast, conducts "naïve" analyses of "police regulations in the seventeenth century, unemployment in the classical era, Pinel's reform and psychiatric

130 Ibid.

131 Ibid., 577.

132 Ibid., 578.

asylums of the nineteenth century," and other minutiae.[133] He maintains, against Derrida, that philosophy "is neither historically nor logically a foundation of knowledge; but that there are conditions and rules for the formation of knowledge."[134] His position emerges quite clearly when he expresses ambivalence toward being described as a positivist: "If, by substituting the analysis of rarity for the search for totalities, the description of relations of exteriority for the theme of transcendental foundation, the analysis of accumulations for the quest of the origin, one is a positivist, then I am quite happy to be one."[135] Philosophical profundity dissolves in the face of concrete historical phenomena. Philosophical purity is set aside for messy empirical study.

Foucault's antipathy toward what I have called "purity" runs through his criticism of theoretical efforts to locate a "single locus of great Refusal, soul of revolt… pure law of the revolutionary."[136] Near the end of the first volume of his *History of Sexuality*, Foucault reiterates his point that power is not purely repressive. Instead, it flows through a variety of practices, and where fields of power operate, sites of resistance

133 Ibid., 576.

134 Ibid., 578. The important task is not to show that this or that entity contains some flaw in its originary relation to philosophy, but to show how things are constructed and of what they're made. A similar point appears in Dewey's reconstructive pragmatism: there is no problematic situation *a priori*, no Problem generally.

135 Quoted in Benjamin Noys, "Between Two Vampires," forthcoming, 2016.

136 Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1978), 95-96.

come into being.[137] Points of resistance are distributed across society as operations of power are, in unassuming sites as well as prominent ones. It is misguided to search for a singular point of refusal exterior to power. Foucault's analysis indicts contemporary practices in political and social theory that involve fixating on the idea of an exterior point of refusal (and finding in all other measures of resistance a fatal complicity). What I have called Foucault's skepticism of "purity" is skepticism of, in particular, the idea that the task of criticism is to uncover, via a finely-tuned system of readings, "faults that are something like a blend of a Christian sin and a Freudian slip…. [a] sin [that] is enough to compromise a whole life."[138] What Foucault objects to is both quasi-metaphysical claims about these sins' "originary relation to philosophy" (and, therefore, their evasion of the detail of everyday practices) and to this form of criticism's Catholic hostility to deviation. Texts must be interrogated (tortured, if necessary) until they give up their sins. When they have done so, they can be excommunicated. This purism is defined, therefore, by a combination of a fixation on favored or disfavored essences susceptible to discovery by careful inquisitors (this text *actually* relies on the metaphysics of presence!) and by a vigorous antideviationism in which variation from a certain position constitutes a basis for scandal (this isn't *truly* radical—it's mere reformism!). Before discussing a few examples of this fixation on purity and profundity in contemporary theory, it's worth considering Dewey's discussion of this sort of thinking in his own time.

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137 Ibid., 95-97.

138 Foucault, *Madness*, 576.

In the summer of 1928, Dewey visited post-revolutionary Russia. Leningrad appears in his writing as "a splendid dress in rags," where "one has the impression of movement, vitality, energy. The people go about as if some mighty and oppressive load had been removed, as if they were newly awakened to the consciousness of released energies."[139] Dewey briefly discusses the relationship between Marxism as a political theory and post-revolutionary life as it was unfolding in front of him. "It is, of course, conceivable that Communism in some form may be the issue of the present 'transition,'" he writes. "But the feeling is forced upon one that, if it does finally emerge, it will not be because of the elaborate and now stereotyped formulae of Marxian philosophy, but because something of that sort is congenial to a people that a revolution has awakened to themselves, and that it will emerge in a form dictated by their own desires."[140] Though Dewey's antipathy toward "elaborate" and abstract formulas for social transformation runs through the book, he does not discount the prospect of broad social and historical change generally. This change, however, is unlikely to square with neat Marxist or capitalist accounts that center on abstract models or on the "logic" of an economic system or historical process that resists being deformed by actually-existing conditions:

> Towards what it is a transition [is] a still wholly undetermined matter. To the orthodox Marxian, the goal is… certain; it is just the communistic institutions his special philosophy of history requires. But personally, I am strongly of the impression that the more successful are the efforts to create a new mentality

139 John Dewey, *Impressions of Soviet Russia* (New York: Columbia Teacher's College, 1964), 7.

140 Ibid., 9-10.

> and a new morality of a coöperative social type, the more dubious is the nature of the goal that will be attained. For, I am wholly inclined to believe, this new attitude of mind, in just the degree in which it is really new and revolutionary, will create its own future society according to its own desires and purposes. This future society will undoubtedly be highly unlike the régime characteristic of the western world of private capital and individual profit. But I think the chances are that it will be equally unlike the society which orthodox Marxian formulæ call for.[141]

The outcomes predicted by and produced in concert with ideas about social change are unlikely to mirror those ideas' abstract structure. The actual course of social change is likely to be contingent and quotidian in a way that orthodox formulas are not. Dewey, like Foucault, finds nothing to fear in actual deviation from an abstract set of propositions. Indeed, he regards the way that actual events take leave of abstract formulas as a source of political and social possibility. "Any predictions about the Russian future has to take into account the contradiction and conflict between rigid dogmas on one side and an experimental spirit on the other," and as the Russian people lay down new forms of life whose relationship to orthodox Marxism is increasingly unclear, "it is likely that the outcome, whatever it may be in fact, will be called communism and will be taken as a realization of the creed of its initial authors."[142] For Dewey, theoretical apparatuses retroactively lay claim to concrete situations rather than determine them in advance. A theoretical purism can only constrain and immobilize social inquiry and efforts to effect social transformation.

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141 Ibid., 75-6.

142 Ibid., 120-3. *Sic.*

Dewey and Foucault remain wary of the types of political-theoretical purism and profundity encapsulated by "profound philosophical interiority" and "abstract formulae."[143] A power pragmatism that draws on Dewey and Foucault would put no stock in divining deep philosophical truths, in developing pure methods, in a locating an exteriority that cannot be ingested or a revolution that cannot be coöpted. These objects of attention are mostly the epiphenomena of prior methodological choices.

Recall Wendy Brown's diagnosis of "left melancholy" fifteen years ago: "If the contemporary Left often clings to the formations and formulations of another epoch, one in which the notion of unified movements, social totalities, and class-based politics appeared to be viable categories of political and theoretical analysis, this means that it literally renders itself a conservative force in history—one that not only misreads the present but installs traditionalism in the very heart of its praxis, in the place where commitment to risk and upheaval belongs."[144] This line of criticism is implicit in Foucault's discussion of Derrida's profound philosophical interiority and his criticism of the search for a means of pure resistance in *The History of Sexuality*, and in Dewey's skepticism that orthodox Marxist formulas could delimit social change in post-revolutionary Russia.

One contemporary manifestation of the sort of theory that Brown, Foucault, and Dewey criticize emerges in the rejection of certain courses of action as insufficiently

143 Ibid, 7-10; Foucault, *Madness*, 577.

144 Wendy Brown, "Resisting Left Melancholy," *boundary 2* 26, no. 3 (1999): 25.

radical, as too closely-bound to present political, economic, and social structures. The left must think and act from a profoundly radical exterior position, this line of thinking goes. To fall short—by, e.g., compromising or aiming for "mere reform"—is to scuttle the possibility of social change. The desired social and political transformation, however, is also understood as the only way to secure the radical exterior from which it must be initiated. A bootstrap paradox shins up: the conditions for radical transformation will never be in place because they can only be achieved by the radical transformation they are meant to effect. This loop can engender a pervasive sense of both confidence and panic,[145] as well as conceptual one-upmanship[146] (*that*'s not the truly radical move, *this* is; the problem with Hitler was that he was not violent enough).[147] As these ways of thinking and writing settle in, they constrict the solution set available to egalitarian and democratic movements, alienating the left from a rich variety of workarounds, direction action, half-measures, reform, lawmaking, lying, stealing, tinkering, bargaining, legerdemain, and aggressive

145 See the remark by the editors of *L'Empire du sociologue* that Pierre Bourdieu's work evoked "the orphaned fervor of denouncing the system with the disenchanted certitude of its perpetuity." Quoted in Kristin Ross's introduction to *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1991), x.

146 As Elizabeth Freeman notes in a different context, "the political result of these… formulations can be that whatever looks newer or more-radical-than-thou has more purchase over prior signs, and that whatever seems to generate continuity seems better left behind." See Freeman, "Packing History, Count(er)ing Generations," in *Further Adventures of* The Dialectic of Sex, ed. Mandy Merck and Stella Sanford (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 256-57.

147 Slavoj Žižek, *Less than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism* (New York: Verso, 2013), 902. See also John Gray, "The Violent Visions of Slavoj Žižek," *The New York Review of Books*, July 12, 2012, and Žižek's response, "The Real of Violence, Cynicism, and the 'Right of Distress'," *The Sinthome* 14 (2013).

tickling. The theoretical trope of dividing solutions rooted in existing social conditions (those that arise from considering problematic situations in their concrete actuality, Dewey might say) from those that are purer, deeper, and more total because of their estrangement from really-existing structures can be observed in various strains of left academic theory. I'll discuss Adrian Parr's *Wrath of Capital* as one example.

Parr treats solutions rooted within extant social conditions with suspicion. She warns, for example, that "the principle at the core of veganism—the individual's power to choose and take responsibility for what he or she consumes—has unfortunately already been co-opted by neoliberal capitalism in its principles of individualism and competition."[148] Parr does not explain what the fact that a given development is linked at economic, cognitive, social, and emotional levels with global capital is meant to say about the development itself. She summarizes veganism's conceptual underpinnings in this way: "some argue that the current situation [of industrial slaughter] is the result of treating animals as commodities; others connect patriarchal forms of violence to animal cruelty; and some maintain that we just do not seem to recognize that animals also have moral worth. None of these positions is wrong…. That said, however, the political trajectory they all offer is veganism. Modifying individual eating habits is understood to be either an act of solidarity for the plight of

148 Parr, *Wrath*, 96. See also Chris J. Cuomo and Brooke Schueneman, "Thinking Against the Wrath of Capital," review of *The Wrath of Capital* by Adrian Parr and *Eco-Sufficiency and Global Justice* by Ariel Salleh, *Hypatia* 29 (2014): 695-701.

animals raised for food or an act of protest against the institutionalized violence perpetrated against them both." Viewing veganism as an act of solidarity or protest means understanding veganism in terms of certain non-concrete abstractions with which the idea of "veganism" is linked. For example, Parr ties veganism with "the cultural project of identity politics." She echoes Nancy Fraser's argument that "privileging the cultural project of identity politics over measures to counter poverty and redistributive justice has had the unfortunate consequence of serving the interests of neoliberal capitalism."[149]

It seems idiosyncratic to view veganism as high-minded protest against factory farming or as action taken "in solidarity" with murdered poultry. More likely, the primary motivation for (and primary effect of) not eating animals is to avoid facilitating the killing of animals. What figures centrally is not whether veganism as an ethos assumes this or that relation with an abstraction like "individualism" (or has some kind of inner essence that "boils down" to individualism or doesn't), but instead concrete situations in which pigs have their skulls beaten to jelly, cows have their tails twisted off, live chickens are tossed into grinders. Not eating animal products means that these things no longer happen on one's behalf, and that they happen less frequently in general. As Chris J. Cuomo and Brooke Schueneman write, "it seems likely that the principle of *harm reduction* rather than individualism is the

149 Parr, *Wrath*, 91-92.

moral core of vegetarianism/veganism."[150] It is possible to think about this harm reduction in concrete terms: in 2014, declining meat consumption lead to 450 million fewer animals' being consumed compared to 2008.[151] A theoretical treatment of global capitalism like Parr's must ask if 450 million fewer slaughtered animals (and attendant reductions in carbon and methane emissions, soil degradation, antibiotic spraying, and so on) can be discounted because those eating fewer animal products may have "already been co-opted by neoliberal capitalism in its principles of individualism and competition."[152] Why is it important to construct an incompatibility between ways of living better within existing structures (e.g., Parr herself notes that she eats vegan "three times a week"[153]) with efforts to reconfigure

150 Cuomo and Schueneman, "Thinking Against," 697-98. Emphasis theirs.

151 The Humane Society of the United States, "Farm Animal Statistics: Slaughter Totals," June 15, 2015, http://www.humanesociety.org/news/resources/research/stats_slaughter_totals.html.

152 Parr, *Wrath*, 96.

153 Parr, *Wrath*, 91.

or destroy these structures?[154] And, as Eve Sedgwick asks, "what makes… amelioration so 'mere'?"[155]

Parr sets "the development of new machinery, more climate resilient seeds, and new agricultural management strategies" against solutions that "fully address the economic life of the free market."[156] She associates the first solution set with "free-market capitalism," criticizes these approaches, and suggests "common solutions" instead.[157] What is the nature of the incompatibility between "common" solutions and seeds that grow in warmer weather, or resist bollworms? It may be the case that, as with *Bacillus thuringiensis* cotton among smallholder farmers in Burkina Faso and the Makhathini Flats region of South Africa, making transgenic seeds available to smallholders leads to pesticide reduction *and also* to the rise of increasingly fragile monocultures, boosted yields *mixed with* increased income inequality, and rising

154 Michelle Murphy, e.g., argues that "feminist health projects have been able to thrive precisely because they have been so often strategically and uncomfortably conditioned by the financial flows, discursive patterns, and interstices of more dominant configurations of biomedicine, family planning, and economic development." See Michelle Murphy, *Seizing the Means of Reproduction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 10. For related arguments in the area of law and race, see Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, "Race, Reform, and Retrenchment: Transformation and Legitimation in Antidiscrimination Law," *Harvard Law Review* 101, no. 7 (1988): 1387.

155 Eve Sedgwick, "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You're so Paranoid You Probably Think This Essay is About You," in *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 144.

156 Adrian Parr, *The Wrath of Capital* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 87.

157 Ibid., 86-87.

standards of living *dependent upon* a monopsony.[158] If mixed outcomes such as these characterize the adoption of transgenic crops and new agricultural techniques, a concerted effort to pursue "common" solutions demands sedulous attention to the technical and material capabilities contributing to better and worse outcomes,[159] the social and institutional feedback loops that sustain a given situation, and the use of all available means to begin to ease knots and interrupt vicious cycles. Detail-oriented, partial solutions that can be repurposed to contribute to broader transformations rather than the golden blare of high theory.

The Earth-devouring capitalism described by Parr appropriates values, procedures, and technics as it needs them and discards what it is no longer useful. It has adopted and shorted a million contradictory positions in the time it has taken me to type this sentence.[160] The theoretical task that follows from this description of global capitalism is *not* to abstract values from concrete situations and code them "inside" or "outside" capitalism, compromised or incorruptible, radical or merely reformist. This converts critical theory into an assembly line for false dichotomies and leads to the surrender of whole vocabularies: don't say you *chose* to become a vegan—that's a

158 Brian Dowd-Uribe, "Engineering yields and inequality? How institutions and agro-ecology shape Bt cotton outcomes in Burkina Faso," *Geoforum* 53 (2014): 161-171.

159 Ibid., 161-64.

160 Figuratively, to be sure, but also literally: see Jacqueline Vanacek, "NYSE Brings Capitalism to the Cloud," *Forbes*, 8 May 2013, http://www.forbes.com/sites/sap/2013/05/08/nyse-brings-capitalism-to-the-cloud/.

neoliberal way of thinking.[161] This is an exaggerated form of what Sedgwick calls paranoid reading in which, e.g., veganism, because it involves a degree of choice, furthers neoliberalism.[162] The availability of contraception accelerates exploitation. New planting techniques retrench capital. For the paranoid reader, "there must be no bad surprises."[163] It is better to anticipate, with unstinting vigilance, every conceivable angle from which undoing may come, every possible mask under which it can hide, than to risk even mild surprise. Concomitantly, paranoid reading "places its faith in *exposure*."[164] The central paranoid task is to uncover hiding places, to *show* its readers that fraudulent ways of thinking and writing are fraudulent. To expose the sin. "Paranoia for all its vaunted suspicion," Sedgwick writes, "acts as though its work would be accomplished if only it could finally, this time, somehow get its story truly known."[165] It is not clear how paranoid theory finds solace if exposure fails to do

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161 Parr, *Wrath*, 91-96.

162 See Sedgwick, "Paranoid Reading," 123-150. Sedgwick further suggests one reason critical paranoia is unsatisfying: what does it tell us that we don't already know?

163 Ibid., 130. (She adds: "because there must be no bad surprises, and because learning of the possibility of a bad surprise would itself constitute a bad surprise, paranoia requires that bad news be always already known.")

164 Ibid.

165 Ibid., 138. Interesting, too, are the ways the dominance of a given paranoid reading can foment splits between theoretical work done by those in the academy and their lived experience: "to a startling extent," Sedgwick writes, "the articulations of New Historicist scholarship rely on the prestige of a single, overarching narrative: exposing and problematizing hidden violences in the genealogy of the modern liberal subject…. 'The modern liberal subject': by now it seems, or ought to seem, anything but an obvious choice as the unique terminus ad quem of historical narrative. Where *are* all these supposed modern liberal subjects? I daily encounter graduate students who are dab hands at unveiling the hidden historical violences that underlie a secular, universalist liberal humanism. Yet these students' sentient years, unlike the formative years of their teachers, have been spent entirely in

much of anything. What happens if, after decades in the withering light of academic scrutiny, the exposed violence only blossoms? "The force of any interpretive project of *unveiling hidden violence*," Sedgwick argues, "would seem to depend on a cultural context, like the one assumed in Foucault's early works, in which violence would be deprecated and hence hidden in the first place. Why bother exposing the ruses of power in a country where, at any given moment, 40 percent of young black men are enmeshed in the penal system?"[166]

This ineffectuality indicates that paranoid reading is not quite as invested in the transmission of revelatory knowledge as it might seem:

> The paranoid trust in exposure seemingly depends… on an infinite reservoir of naïveté in those who make up the audience for these unveilings. What is the basis for assuming that it will surprise or disturb, never mind motivate, anyone to learn that a given social manifestation is artificial, self-contradictory, imitative, phantasmatic, or even violent?... How television-starved would someone have to be to find it shocking that ideologies contradict themselves, that simulacra don't have originals, or that gender representations are artificial?... Some exposes, some demystifications, some bearings of witness do have great effectual force (though often of an unanticipated kind). Many that are just as true and convincing have none at all, however, and as long as that is

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a xenophobic Reagan-Bush-Clinton-Bush America where 'liberal' is, if anything, a taboo category and where 'secular humanism' is routinely treated as a marginal religious sect, while a vast majority of the population claims to engage in direct intercourse with multiple invisible entities such as angels, Satan, and God" (139).

[166] Ibid., 140. In the run-up to Trump's election, the alt-right were fond of quoting a scene in *The Dark Knight Rises* in which one villain (a kind of corporate centrist, in fact) protests to another "I've paid you a small fortune." And the other, the stronger and more extreme, says "And this gives you power over me?" and kills him. Except, when the white supremacists quote the scene, they replace "I've paid you a small fortune" with "But I've called you a racist."

> so, we must admit that the efficacy and directionality of such acts reside somewhere else than in their relation to knowledge per se.[167]

The weak relationship between paranoid reading and what actually transpires in the world is further vexed by paranoid theory's inability to anticipate and respond flexibly to what goes on around it. As Sedgwick notes, "while its general tenor of 'things are bad and getting worse' is immune to refutation, any more specific predictive value—and as a result, arguably, any value for making oppositional strategy—has been nil. Such accelerating failure to anticipate change is, moreover, as I've discussed, entirely in the nature of the paranoid process, whose sphere of influence… only expands as each unanticipated disaster seems to demonstrate more conclusively that, guess what, *you can never be paranoid enough.*"[168] Moreover, paranoid work tends to "masquerade as the very stuff of truth" and to supplant other, more reparative forms of theory:

> the present paranoid consensus… may… have required a certain disarticulation, disavowal, and misrecognition of other ways of knowing, ways less oriented around suspicion, that are actually being practiced, often by the same theorists and as part of the same projects. The monopolistic program of paranoid knowing systematically disallows any explicit recourse to reparative motives, no sooner to be articulated than subject to methodical uprooting. Reparative motives, once they become explicit, are inadmissible in paranoid theory both because they are about pleasure ('merely aesthetic') and because they are frankly ameliorative ('merely reformist').[169]

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[167] Ibid., 141.

168 Ibid., 142. Emphasis Sedgwick.

[169] Ibid., 138, 144.

What is the nature of the link between the technosocial developments Parr criticizes and the patterns of exploitation and despoliation she aims to resist? This link emerges from sets of connections drawn between concepts set in relation to each other in a theoretical field. If a concrete development can be dissolved upward into abstractions like "choice" or "individual action,"[170] then those nodes can be linked in a theoretical field with immense, flexible, composed abstractions (what Latour calls "social stuff")[171] like "capitalism" or "late liberalism." The theorist calls on sedimented associations to show that patterns of behavior and thought occurring in concrete material, quotidian, and institutional circumstances are in fact the tendrils of a deathless abstract entity. What the naïve activist, farmer, scientist, or social worker thought of as positive was secreting capital all along. Postulating and linking objects of analysis in a conceptual field becomes the central game of critical inquiry.[172] The

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170 Another difficulty with poisoning individualist vocabulary crops up near the end of *Wrath*: it is hard not to recur to this vocabulary. The final paragraph of Parr's book begins: "In many respects, writing this book has been an anxious exercise because I am fully aware that reducing the issues of environmental degradation and climate change to the domain of analysis can stave off the institution of useful solutions. But in my defense I would also like to propose that each and every one of us has certain skills that we can contribute to making the solutions that we introduce in response to climate change and environmental degradation more effective and more realistic" (147). We individuals—each of us making our way in the world, developing skill sets we can put to work if we so choose—all have a role to play. The fact that it is so easy to play gotcha with this particular vocabulary of individualism does not suggest that the gotcha game is useful. Instead, it suggests the opposite: because the game has been played so freely, its capacity for insight has frayed.

171 Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor–Network Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 47-48, 64-66.

172 "Homoeopathic magic," Frazer writes in *The Golden Bough*, "commits the mistake of assuming that things which resemble each other are the same: contagious magic commits the mistake of assuming that things which have once been in contact with each other are always in contact… Both branches of magic, the homoeopathic and the contagious, may conveniently be comprehended under the general name of Sympathetic Magic, since both assume that things act on each other at a distance

critical task is to gather radical, profound (because unconnected in the conceptual field with disfavored abstractions) accounts and expose compromised, superficial (because associated with disfavored abstractions) accounts. (And, conveniently, the theorist herself becomes indispensable to this process. Ranciére once criticized Althusser along these lines: "If everyone dwells in illusion… then the solution can only come from a kind of muscular theoretical heroism on the part of the lone theorist.")[173]

Constructing a politics with this approach is like bailing with a sieve, however, because no social phenomenon is ever pure, ever free of influence by a wide variety of contradictory forces and tendencies. The "outside" of an abstract whole, e.g. capitalism or rationality, is a constitutive outside, as Judith Butler and others have discussed.[174] This is partly why inversion theses rarely fail: as Stuart Hall wrote, "*you can always put it another way if you try hard enough*."[175] The right has taken advantage of

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through a secret sympathy, the impulse being transmitted from one to the other by means of what we may conceive as a kind of invisible ether, not unlike that which is postulated by modern science for a precisely similar purpose, namely, to explain how things can physically affect each other through a space which appears to be empty." See *The Golden Bough* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995), 14.

173 Ross's introduction to *Ignorant Schoolmaster*, xvii. See also Sasha Lilley, "Left Catastrophism," in *Catastrophism: The Apocalyptic Politics of Collapse and Rebirth* (London: Specter, 2012), 44-76, and Lee Quinby's discussion of the role masculinity plays in left apocalypticism in Quinby, "The Deployment of Apocalyptic Masculinity," *Journal of Millenial Studies* 2 (1999).

174 Butler, *Bodies that Matter* (New York: Routledge, 1993); Ernesto Laclau, "Subject of Politics, Politics of the Subject," *differences* 7 (1995): 146-164.

175 Hall offers this to the Left as one lesson of Thatcherism. Stuart Hall, "Thatcher's Lessons," *Marxism Today*, March 1988, 21. Emphasis his.

Hall's lesson, turning "market solutions," "deregulation," "privatization," and so forth into ambidextrous, robust membranes that make claims to social good and coat everything in reach. Too often the critical Left has done the opposite, expelling like so much oxygen everything from veganism to the language of rights to the word "individual."[176] Whole vocabularies burn as fuel in the search for a "single locus of great Refusal."[177]

The tasks of reconstruction and transformation, following Dewey, are more likely to involve an arduous picking-through rather than a clean sprint from the ruins of the old order. Moreover, there are good reasons to exercise caution around radical transformations, not least because pining for ruptures overlooks the dangers that may arise in a world remade. Samera Esmeir, for example, ends her discussion of the way colonial law in Egypt created juridical persons with the point that "the terror, then, is in the answer to the following question: If the juridical human contains both the natural subject and the legal person while at the same time erasing the distinction between them, to what plane does the human degenerate upon the withdrawal of the law?"[178] Even when systems leave much to be desired—even when they bring about the deaths of those within them—they may countenance legal and material life-

176 See Patricia J. Williams, "Alchemical Notes: Reconstructing Ideals from Deconstructed Rights" *Harvard Civil Liberties—Civil Rights Law Review* 401 (1987).

177 Foucault, *Sexuality*, 95-96.

178 Samera Esmeir, *Juridical Humanity: A Colonial History* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014), 86.

support systems. James Baldwin relates a similar worry when he reflects on his visit with Elijah Muhammad in Chicago. He writes that "when I sat at Elijah's table and watched the baby, the women, and the men, and we talked about God's—or Allah's—vengeance, I wondered, when that vengeance was achieved, *What will happen to all that beauty then?*"[179] Baldwin worries that the revolution prophesied by the Nation of Islam has the potential to destroy what is worth keeping. (Baldwin recognizes, however, that there may be no choice, that revolutionary vengeance cannot be stayed: "I could also see that the intransigence and ignorance of the white world might make that vengeance inevitable." The coming violence promised by this vengeance, however, gives cause for lament, not celebration.)[180]

There is no reason to conflate programs for action that situate themselves as exterior to existing social conditions with those most capable of disrupting existing social conditions. On the contrary, action that takes as its means and object really-existing material and technosocial currents bears a greater capacity for transforming or exploding present social conditions and collective self-understandings than do hypothetical radical-exterior moves.[181]

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179 James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* (New York: Dial Press, 1963), 119. Emphasis his.

180 See also *Space is the Place*, John Coney (Berkeley, CA: Rhapsody Films, 1974).

181 Surely, however, an essential step for the transformation of a social condition involves transforming not only the content of circulating meanings and values, but also changing their very form. A transvaluation not just of all values, but of what it means to value. In fact, these meaning-mechanisms are changed by being worked and reworked, palimpsest-like, until they deform and admit new meanings. What would a truly exogenous transvaluation even look like? I imagine

Retreating into a kind of hermetic arch-impossibilism is perfectly defensible for the same reasons that it is perfectly useless. To shirk engagement for putatively principled reasons is to assume an invulnerable, sealed critical position with no exit or entrance, a glass-walled garden.[182] One thinks of Baldwin's story of being refused service at a crowded Chicago bar. There's an argument. The white customers ignore the commotion. "The three of us," Baldwin writes,

> stood at the bar trembling with rage and frustration, and drinking—and trapped, now in the airport, for we had deliberately come early in order to have a few drinks and to eat… a young white man standing near us asked if we were students…. I told him that he hadn't wanted to talk to us earlier and we didn't want to talk to him now. The reply visibly hurt his feelings, and this, in turn, caused me to despise him. But when one of us, a Korean War veteran, told this young man that the fight we had been having in the bar had been his fight, too, the young man said, 'I lost my conscience a long time ago,' and turned and walked out.[183]

One hears this sort of high-minded disengagement from young Americans who refuse to vote because "both options are the same" (or because "the answer is somewhere in the middle"), from those who disdain direct action because "it won't accomplish anything" or because "nothing will change," from those who shirk responding to climate change because "it's too late; there's nothing we can do." One sentiment, common enough to graduate students (and professors) in the humanities

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something like alien-invasion movies that take colonialism as their metaphorical tenor: contact between foreign systems in which one is stripped right down to its roots.

182 "Happiness is a garden walled with glass: there's no way in or out," Margaret Atwood writes.

183 Baldwin, *Fire*, 70.

and social sciences, is the idea that "things" (by which is meant: other people's lives) have to get worse before they can get better. Sedgwick points out that this sentiment is undergirded by "the cruel and contemptuous assumption that the one thing lacking for global revolution, explosion of gender roles, or whatever, is people's (that is, other people's) having the painful effects of their oppression, poverty, or deludedness sufficiently exacerbated to make the pain conscious (as if otherwise it wouldn't have been) and intolerable (as if intolerable situations were famous for generating excellent solutions)."[184]

To explain the various ways that sentiments like "both parties are the same" or "nothing will change" are empirically wrong is beside the point. These statements do not reflect judgments about the concrete effects a given pattern of action may have. They perform and reinforce a conceptual link between cynicism and perceptiveness.[185] The link between cynicism and perceptiveness is, to put it as straightforwardly as Peter Sloterdijk does, a "universally widespread way in which enlightened people see to it that they are not taken for suckers."[186] Sedgwick argues that this kind of relentlessly negative ideation also "has [a] thorough practice of

184 Sedgwick, "Paranoid," 144.

185 If you would like to convince someone to abandon this high-minded disengagement, you are better off trying to swap nodes on the conceptual field by arguing that the truly radical position to take is not "A is actually ~A" but instead "A is actually ~~A." E.g., that voting or direct action are actually truly radical because of some theoretical triple Lutz. This will last until someone else lands a quadruple Lutz. Given that the local gravity for this sort of theory is quite low, you will not have to wait long. (*Q.v.* note 146.)

186 Quoted in Sedgwick, "Paranoid," 141.

disavowing its affective motive and force and masquerading as the very stuff of truth."[187] To get away from paranoia is also, in part, to get away from purity and profundity. Thankfully, there are ways of thinking outside this paranoid discourse, not least because "for someone to have an unmystified view of systemic oppressions does not *intrinsically* or *necessarily* enjoin that person to any specific train of epistemological or narrative consequences."[188]

Dewey and Foucault's shared resistance to purity and profundity crystallizes into lines of criticism against Derrida's philosophical interiority, the clean rigidity of orthodox Marxism, and energetically paranoid leftist searches for radical exteriority. Phrased in the terms Sedgwick offers, power pragmatism represents an attempt to combine an unmystified view of power relations with a reparative and ameliorative sense of inquiry (rather than a paranoiac one).

To undertake an ameliorative project, moreover, is not to blind oneself to the difficult, tragic elements of politics, but to bring oneself into closer contact with them.

187 Ibid., 138.

188 Ibid., 124.

§2.1.2 Tragedy and futurity

What can a sense of the tragic do for a political theory? How do the tragic tones in Dewey and Foucault's work inform their understandings of political life? I can begin to answer this question by noting that "tragic" as it is used here begins with the recognition that every course of action in a political-ethical context is subject to a balancing test: everything necessarily involves tradeoffs. There is no perfect decision from every perspective in a given field or situation. Every decision is compromised, carries with it the knowledge of past errors and wrongs and a painful awareness that the current decision will engender further wrongs. We don't only screw up when we err. We screw up when we do the right thing.

Dewey and Foucault rarely get explicit about tragedy. It's necessary to bring out the role of the tragic in each thinker. Eddie Glaude has done a great deal to excavate Dewey's sense of the tragic in the context of black politics.[189] Glaude, following Dewey, Baldwin, and Toni Morrison, argues that the tragic nature of a moral choice resides in the banal-sounding fact that "we confront situations that demand of us a choice between competing values."[190] This formulation—of confronting a situation in which we must choose between better and worse alternatives—is distinctly

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[189] Other notable work in this area includes Sidney Hook, "Pragmatism and the Tragic Sense of Life" *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 33 (1960): 5-26 and Cornel West's discussion of that essay in *The American Evasion of Philosophy* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 119-124.

190 Eddie Glaude, *In a Shade of Blue: Pragmatism and the Politics of Black America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 26.

Deweyan. Glaude (echoing criticisms of profundity and purity) warns against efforts "to uncover one single principle of morality. These efforts, in whatever form, fail to acknowledge the centrality of uncertainty and conflict to our moral experiences. Instead, a litany of dualities—good and evil, justice and injustice, duty and caprice, virtue and vice—render moral conflict as only specious and apparent, not as an inherent part of the good, the obligatory, and the virtuous. In such a view, with its ready-made distinctions and dualities, 'the only force which can oppose the moral is the immoral.'"[191] Painful and essential choices confront those who engage in meliorative work. Sacrifice and conflict cannot be avoided, contained, or neutralized. The task of a pragmatist political theory is not to shirk strife,[192] but to offer tools for the flexible, tough-minded, and intelligent navigation of problematic situations: to recognize that pain and strife are built into political life, and not simply as procedural necessities,[193] but as wounding and irresolvable elements of politics. Don't these wounds fade as we struggle forward, however? Is it not true that what doesn't kill you makes you stronger? Isn't my position that politics involves short- and medium-term stressors that can be damped through the sure application of a critical intelligence?

191 Ibid., 26-27.

192 But neither is it to amplify strife for its own sake, unless such moves are understood as tactical necessities.

193 See Alison Kadlec and Will Friedman, "Deliberative Democracy and the Problem of Power," *Journal of Public Deliberation* 3 (2007).

Regrettably, many wounds are permanent. Pragmatism's task is not to erase wounding, only to move forward with wounds, even terminal ones, and to engender conditions under which present and future wounds can be shallower, fewer, less often terminal. Glaude finds in Toni Morison's *Beloved* deep expression of the weight of this task. In the bravura moment of both his and Morrison's book, he gives us this passage, in which Baby Suggs recites a litany of wounds but urges Denver to go on anyway:

> You mean I never told you nothing about Carolina? About your daddy? You don't remember about how come I walk the way I do and about mother's feet, not to speak of her back? I never told you all that? Is that why you can't walk down the steps? My Jesus my.
>
> But you said there was no defense.
>
> There ain't.
>
> Then what do I do?
>
> Know it, but go on out the yard. Go on.[194]

Baby Suggs, Glaude argues, recites unhealable wounds "not to elicit resignation, but to urge Denver to act intelligently in the world: 'Know it, but go on out the yard.' The 'it' refers to the pain and suffering that is constitutive of black experiences in the United States…. Tragedy is understood, then, as an ineliminable part of what it

194 Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (New York: Vintage, 2004), 244. Quoted in Glaude, *Blue*, 43.

means to be a black agent in this world."[195] Glaude does not deny centuries of chattel slavery and institutional racism. *In a Shade of Blue* is never far from mourning, never out from under poplar trees. Yet, Glaude carries forward a commitment to pragmatic meliorism as a way of moving into a future worth living: "*Beloved* doesn't end with satisfactory outcomes guaranteed. At the end of the story, we are faced with broken human beings trying to piece together a life with one another. No grace still, real or imagined…. In the end, I believe Morrison's novel brilliantly realizes what I have called the pragmatic view of tragedy: we must look the tragedy of our moral experiences squarely in the face and, with little certainty as to the outcomes, *humbly* act to make a better world for ourselves and our children."[196]

Glaude draws on James Baldwin to elaborate the task of limping into better futures. Baldwin mourns "this past, the Negro's past, of rope, fire, torture, castration, infanticide, rape; death and humiliation; fear by day and night, fear as deep as the marrow of the bone; doubt that he was worthy of life… rage, hatred, and murder, hatred for white men so deep that it often turned against him and his own, and made all love, all trust, all joy impossible."[197] Baldwin does not salve or sentimentalize. He writes time and again of the need to continue living with unhealable wounds, the necessity "that we, with love, shall force our brothers to see themselves as they are, to

195 Glaude, *Blue*, 43-44.

196 Ibid., 44-45. Emphasis Glaude's.

197 Baldwin, *Fire*,112.

cease fleeing from reality and begin to change it."[198] Baldwin's commitment to the world as it is cannot be avoided: "Here we are, at the center of the arc, trapped in the gaudiest, most valuable, and most improbable water wheel the world has ever seen. Everything now, we must assume is in our hands; we have no right to assume otherwise."[199]

Baldwin's second sentiment is not designed to redeem his first. The wounds and crimes remain unforgivable, even by those wounded, even by time.[200] Even by Baldwin's *own* formulation of the need to keep going. That Baldwin offers no solution to his own problem is unsettling. He offers perseverance not as a fix nor as penance, but as a constant accompaniment to and condition of black life. The two coexist not because perseverance soothes what has come before, but because each, separately, cannot be denied. No relationship of resolution or overcoming exists between them. You are wounded, and you are going to keep breathing. This unfixability establishes the tragic nature of action taken now and in the future.

The coexistence of Baldwin's senses of wounding and perseverance is crucial to take into the heart of a power pragmatism because it troubles the "problem-solution" vocabulary I have at times employed. It teaches pragmatism about its limits by offering a tragic sensibility as a powerful centering tool. This sensibility suggests that

198 Ibid., 24.

199 Ibid., 119.

200 Ibid., 19.

everything is to various degrees a balancing test. Do not expect to be able to get something for nothing, no matter how clever you are. Expect instead that putting forward a proposition, achieving a goal, or loosening a material constraint involves giving something else up. This maxim is temporally loose: the sacrifice may have happened long ago, or it could still be on its way. It is possible to mistake what has been lost for what has been gained. Pointing out that a course of action secrets an undesirable way of thinking is not sufficient to have shown that course to be undesirable full stop. It is only to have shown it to be one stream of action among others, implicated as everything is in conflicting webs of choices, resources, and histories. As Dewey writes, "Unless one gives up the whole struggle as hopeless, one has to choose between alternatives."[201] Bravery lies in choosing, not in refusal.

A tragic sensibility also helps pragmatism avoid congealing into a viscous incrementalism. By understanding power, violence, and domination not as symptoms to be palliated but as constitutive and irresolvable elements of living together, power pragmatism highlights rather than shirks the urgency of responding to specific horrors. Equal concern, respect, and fairness are not understood as abstract liberal principles that gradually permeate society, but instead as tools and techniques for disrupting all manner of pernicious and recirculating cycles of violence. To think pragmatically involves using all the tools available to you to confront specters both

201 John Dewey, *A Common Faith* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), 81.

immediate and deep, from slaughterhouse cholera[202] to preteens killed for playing with airsoft guns[203] to being taught to hate the color you see in the mirror.[204] Incrementalism and idealism are equally inadequate in the face of these horrors. No one who has seen her own blood is not a pragmatist.

Pragmatism's tragic dimension, then, takes account of histories of violence, permanent wounds, necessary sacrifices, and lifesaving compromises.[205] Where in Dewey and Foucault does this tragic dimension emerge? Though Foucault offers a fleeting discussion of a tragic dimension to subjectivity in his *History of Madness*,[206] I focus on how his mobilization of rights-talk in the final years of his life reflects his sense of the urgent, tragic dimensions of politics.

Starting in the late 1970s and continuing into the 1980s, Foucault begins to employ the language of rights in different political and intellectual settings, including his criticism of "all abuses of rights" in French prisons in the late '70s.[207] Foucault's late

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202 Paula Young Lee, *Meat, Modernity, and the Rise of the Slaughterhouse* (Lebanon, NH: University of New Hampshire Press, 2008), 130, 202.

203 "Developments in the Law: Policing," *Harvard Law Review* 128 (2015): 1707-1798.

204 Kenneth B. Clark and Mamie P. Clark, "Racial Identification and Preference among Negro Children," in *Readings in Social Psychology*, ed. E. L. Hartley (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1947).

205 See also West, *Evasion*, 211-239.

206 Foucault, *History of Madness*, 26-28.

207 Quoted in Thomas Keenan, "The 'Paradox' of Knowledge and Power: Foucault on the Bias," in *Fables of Responsibility: Aberrations and Predicaments in Ethics and Politics* (Stanford: Stanford University

"turn toward rights" is much discussed.[208] It presents something of an intellectual and historical puzzle. Is it simply the case that, as Richard Wolin argues, Foucault abandoned previous postructuralist commitments, especially his critiques of an autonomous subject, in turning "increasingly toward a politics of human rights"?[209] Is Foucault's late mobilization of rights-talk a kind of recantation?

Joan Reynolds and Ben Golder contest this reading. Reynolds interprets rights-talk in Foucault as a sort of "pragmatic humanism" that "seek[s] to transgress present limits through practices of self-mastery and interaction with others who share certain historical experiences… [and] gives Foucault's subjects the means to be active agents in the construction of their own meaning."[210] Reynolds holds that Foucault has good reasons for invoking the language of rights and other "humanist" figments. These reasons have to do with the lived experiences of those enmeshed in power relations. Reynolds offers several criticisms against those who read Foucault's invocation of rights as a rapprochement with liberalism,[211] but one argument she does *not* make is

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Press, 1997), 168; see also Ben Golder, *Foucault and the Politics of Rights* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2015), 15.

208 Richard Wolin, "From the 'Death of Man' to Human Rights: The Paradigm Change in French Intellectual Life, 1968–1986," in *The Frankfurt School Revisited, and Other Essays on Politics and Society* (New York: Routledge, 2006); Joan Reynolds, "'Pragmatic Humanism' in Foucault's Later Work," *Canadian Journal of Political Science / Revue canadienne de science politique* 37, no. 4 (2004): 951-977; Golder, *Rights*, 31-33, 152-55.

209 Wolin, "Human Rights," 177-78. Quoted in Golder, *Rights*, 152.

210 Reynolds, "'Pragmatic Humanism'," 951-53.

211 Ibid., 954-57, 960.

that the recantation thesis is only plausible within a reading concerned with connections between theoretical nodes in a conceptual field[212] to the exclusion of Foucault's concerns about "the need for collective rights as a form of resistance against domination" and "enabling, positive practices in which the freedom of the present might secure its autonomy."[213] My earlier arguments about *The Wrath of Capital* apply in part to Wolin's reading of Foucault: the practice of using textual figments like "individual" or "rights" to link disparate nodes on a conceptual field is insufficient as a method of political criticism. (Not least because of the deformation and disanalogies between and among textual figments, the theoretical matrices in which they assume meaning, and concrete political moves.)

Ben Golder, joining Reynolds's line of argument, describes Foucault's rights-talk as a "counterinvestment" in rights, a move underlain by the "strategic pragmatism of the genealogist who seeks to use the available political resources of the time."[214] Not a recantation but an incantation. Building on Reynolds and Golder, I argue that what those like Wolin read as Foucault's liberal turn is instead driven by a pragmatic-tragic

212 Although she comes close, albeit in a different register, when she writes that "the pragmatic rejection of fixed and directly applicable criteria rests on a rejection of absolutes, or the fixed rationality that lies beneath the criterial view of morality because it places primacy on practice rather than on epistemological foundations" (ibid., 961). It's worth noting, however, that this formulation remains within a broadly anti-Kantian, anti-rationalist stream of criticism with limited applicability to the sort of widely-sown abstraction procedures I am thinking of when I mention abstract nodes set in a conceptual field.

213 Ibid., 972-73.

214 Golder, *Rights*, 21, 155-56.

sensibility rooted in, among other things, interest in the prospect of lifesaving compromise.

Golder writes: "Foucault now better perceives the ways… rights can function to contest and remake relations of power—but without ever losing sight of their (often paradoxical) limitations. His is a critical, but often quite ambivalent, appropriation of rights discourse. Rights emerge in Foucault's (later) account as potentially useful, tactical instruments in political struggle, as political tools immanent and not exterior to the field of political combat."[215] Two threads can be pulled from this passage: Foucault's obvious interest in what happens in political struggles[216] (his pragmatism) and the shifting role played by his ambivalence toward rights. Foucault's pragmatism is manifest in his interest in rights not as a theoretical object that can be extended, justified, universalized on one hand and critiqued, deconstructed, revealed as rotten on the other, but as "potentially useful, tactical instruments in political struggle."[217] As tools.[218] Damn whether the raft is Bolshevik or Menshevik: does it float? Like Dewey, Foucault is concerned "to imagine a future which is the projection of the

215 Ibid., 6.

216 For an account of Foucault's interest in tactics and concrete political outcomes as informed by engagements with French Maoism, see Mads Peter Karlsen and Kaspar Villadsena, "Foucault, Maoism, Genealogy: The Influence of Political Militancy in Michel Foucault's Thought," *New Political Science* 37 (2014): 91-117.

217 Ibid.

218 (Which invites the question of why those picking pejoratives for Foucault's late work often go with "liberal" or, of course, "neoliberal" when "instrumental" is closer and more interesting.)

desirable in the present, and to invent the instrumentalities of its realization."[219] Dewey and Foucault share this pragmatism.

The source of Foucault's ambivalence toward the use of rights is less obvious. Which valences is he torn between? The first valence is familiar: Foucault's longstanding critique of an autonomous subject contests the neutrality and universality of rights claims.[220] Employing the language of rights loops Foucault into processes of subjectivation he may not wish to countenance. Invoking rights is a risk. No one understands this better than Foucault. Why run this risk, then? This question brings up the second, tragic valence at play: the prospect of avoiding suffering and death, of securing some life-preserving degree of resistance against "intensification[s] of power relations."[221] This second valence gives Foucault's use of rights its tragic core.

Foucault's appeals to rights are not best read as a credulous rapprochement with liberalism. Foucault mobilizes rights as a set of socially-constructed tools and procedures inflected with power. Consider this criticism of the French carceral system: "[the prison's] internal rules . . . are always absolutely contrary to the fundamental laws that in the rest of society guarantee the rights of man."[222] Foucault

219 Dewey, "Recovery of Philosophy," 68-69.

220 Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1977), 195-230.

221 Michel Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?" in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon, 1984), 48.

222 Michel Foucault, "Alternatives to the Prison: Dissemination or Decline of Social Control?," *Theory, Culture & Society* 26, no. 6 (2009): 19; quoted in Golder, *Rights*, 15.

is not positing "fundamental laws" establishing "the rights of man" that prison officials are bound to obey. Consider what, exactly, the prison sets itself against: "the fundamental laws *that in the rest of society guarantee* the rights of man."[223] Foucault speaks from within the vocabulary that constitutes his object of analysis. This is the same ventriloquy present in much of his work.[224] Yet, this ventriloquy does not vacate the possibility of making concrete political claims in a given context. To become more closely attuned to the limits and dangers immanent to the procedures and tools available to you is not to wallow in paradox, but to achieve a necessary condition for repurposing those procedures and tools for emancipatory ends.[225]

In "Letter to Certain Leaders of the Left," a 1977 article in *Le Nouvel Observateur* on disputes over the right of asylum, Foucault warns against "dangerous extensions of power and distortions in the area of recognized rights."[226] Again, Foucault's claim is not something like "rights are being trampled by power," but concerns instead certain

223 Ibid. Emphasis mine.

224 Most notably in *The Order of Things*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1970).

225 See, e.g., Murphy's description of "protocol feminism." She understands the feminist self-help clinics that rose to prominence in the 1970s as examples of "protocols," that is, "mobile set[s] of practices... mode[s] of arranging knowledge production and health care… procedural script[s] that strategically assemble technologies, exchange, epistemologies, subjects…. Put simply, a protocol establishes 'how to' do something, how to compose the technologies, subjects, exchanges, affects, processes, and so on that make up a moment of health care practice," or, for that matter, political practice. See Murphy, *Seizing*, 25-26.

226 Michel Foucault, "Letter to Certain Leaders of the Left," in *Essential Works of Foucault*, vol. 3, 427.

"distortions in the area of *recognized rights*."[227] The use of the phrase "recognized rights," *droits reconnus*,[228] keeps with Foucault's analysis of rights as something made and remade, a discourse that involves practices of recognition rather than essential features. He invokes the "right" of asylum with a tiny genealogy, noting that "for thousands of years, the private practice of asylum has been one of those lessons that individual hearts have given to states," and that what is now recognized by the international legal apparatus as a right to asylum emerges from the interplay of the "private practice[s]" of "individual hearts" and state recognition.[229]

This contingent, rights-generating interplay does not block an instrumental approach to rights. Rights remain something that can be used in "a concrete, specific, and urgent case."[230] As William E. Connolly notes, Foucault is torn between his "drive to disturb the forces of normalization" and his "quest to sustain the preconditions of democratic life."[231] The tragic dimension of Foucault's thought comes from the awareness that the "preconditions of democratic life" are fragile and constantly imperiled, and from the idea that at times one's best hope for securing those

227 Ibid. Emphasis mine.

228 Michel Foucault, "Lettre à quelques leaders de la gauche," *Le Nouvel Observateur*, November 28 – December 4, 1977, 59.

229 Foucault, "Letter," 426-27.

230 Ibid., 427.

231 William E. Connolly, *Politics and Ambiguity* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), 107-108. See also J. Peter Euben, *The Tragedy of Political Theory: The Road not Taken* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 24-26.

preconditions lies with tools and strategies, like rights, that involve processes of subjectivation whose effects are neither obvious nor unambiguous, and may be linked with the imperiling of democratic life to begin with. We are in danger, and our tools for defending ourselves put us in further danger. There is no transcendental right answer, only ways of thinking, moves, tactics, and strategies that allow further movement. This is tragic, because it means we will always be hurting, always on the run in some sense, but it is not nihilistic. It echoes Glaude's, Dewey's, Baldwin's, and Morrison's point that we must know our wounds cannot be healed, but press on.[232]

One technique for this sort of self-defense lies with reconfiguring the status of the sciences as a theoretical and political object of analysis.

§2.1.3 Science, technology, and social relations

Dewey and Foucault are both interested in the ways that scientific inquiry enters into relations with the social systems and historical trajectories within and around it. Dewey, for his part, links scientific problems with everyday problems. The coextensiveness of concrete problems and scientific problems (or, perhaps, the recognition of those terms as preliminary distributions having to do with different

[232] For a related argument, including a discussion about why thinking differently about time may be useful for this endeavor, see Jishnu Guha-Majumdar, "The Dilemmas of Hope and History: Concrete Utopianism in Octavia Butler's Kindred," *Palimpsest*, forthcoming, 2017. [fix this cite when the paper comes out]

zones of comportment and practice rather than with a given epistemological status or essence) contributes to Dewey's notion of science not as reading from the great book of nature, but as a set of practices and methods of inquiry that, at their best moments, allow certain humans in certain situations to be somewhat less wrong, to act slightly better than they otherwise might.[233]

Dewey takes an instrumental approach to scientific inquiry. Scientific and technological shifts make available new technics, push on the boundaries of material constraints, and open new currents of thought in a given milieu. These overlapping shifts allow for the development of new tactics for altering political and social situations. This view requires a particular understanding of what scientific inquiry does. For example, how does Dewey understand a statement like "science tells us that water is H_2O"?

For Dewey, science does not "disclose" or "'express'… the inner nature of things."[234] Instead, "'science' signifies just that mode of statement that is most helpful as direction."[235] The statement "water is H_2O" derives its meaning from the fact that understanding water as a chemical substance comprised of two hydrogen atoms covalently bonded with an oxygen atom makes it possible to "produce pure water" or

233 John Dewey and Arthur Bentley, *Knowing and the Known*, in *The Later Works*, vol. 16, 52-253.

234 John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: Penguin, 2005), 87-88.

235 Ibid.

"test anything that is likely to be taken for water."[236] "Water is H_2O" is not meaningful because it is a successful crayon-rubbing of the Book of Nature.[237] It does not pull back the curtain on a fixed world. "Water is H_2O" is a building block, a constituent for new directions, actions, capabilities, and understandings.[238] Science consists in "the invention of an equipment, a technique of appliances and procedures, which" distinguishes "the authenticated from the spurious… by specific modes of treatment in specific situations."[239] Scientific postulates are composed and can be decomposed if more fruitful ways of understanding are formulated. For Dewey, the scientific method offers the least-bad way of discerning better courses of action in given circumstances. As Eric MacGilvray writes, albeit in a slightly different context, "Science for the pragmatist is not, as the caricature has it, a worldview that renders traditional ethical discourse obsolete, nor is it simply a method that can be applied indiscriminately to all kinds of social problems. Pragmatism treats scientific inquiry instead as an enormously successful set of practices... and aims to assess the

236 Ibid., 88.

237 Neil Evernden, *The Social Creation of Nature* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 52; Olaf Pedersen, *The Book of Nature* (Notre Dame: The University of Notre Dame Press, 1992).

238 Dewey's phrasing obscures the extent to which this "building block" is not merely a human contrivance. "Water is H2O" is heterogeneous achievement, won not only by scientific procedures but by hydrogen atoms, the balance of forces that comprise covalent bonds, borosilicate glass beakers, the epoxy resin of lab benches, the non-luminous flame of a Bunsen burner, and so forth.

239 Dewey "Recovery," 4.

implications of this success for our understanding of human capacities and purposes."[240]

Science is a method for "laying down a path in walking"[241] rather than an epistemological clearing or a neutral vantage around which the world clarifies itself like the eye of a reversed tornado. To engage with scientific methods of inquiry is not to adopt a scientistic, deductive-nomological view of objectively-determined facts making up a fixed external world. Rather, science involves a contingent "trust in specific procedures" and the application of a "technique of appliances and procedures" embedded in experience.[242] Dewey's focus on appliances and procedures disrupts philosophical views of knowledge in which "the knower, however defined, is set over against the world to be known" and "knowing consists in possessing a transcript, more or less accurate but otiose, of real things."[243] The view of a knower set apart from what is known is mistaken because "if it be true that the self or subject of experience is part and parcel of the course of events"—and Dewey thinks it is true—"it follows that the self *becomes* a knower…. in virtue of a distinctive way of

240 Eric. A. MacGilvray, "Five Myths about Pragmatism, Or, against a Second Pragmatic Acquiescence," *Political Theory* 28, No. 4 (2000): 480-508. Note the recurrence of the qualifier "human."

241 Evan Thompson, *Life in Mind* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 166.

242 Dewey, "Recovery," 4. Dewey's phrasing again belies the extent to which scientific procedures involve constant mutual interaction and exchange between actants other than human beings. *Q.v.* note 225.

243 Ibid.

partaking in the course of events."[244] When Dewey emphasizes concrete techniques and procedures, he is not gliding over the true import of scientific inquiry. Techniques and procedures for better action and knowing *are* science. And scientific methods of understanding constitute science's chief contribution to social inquiry. "The significant distinction," Dewey writes, "is no longer between the knower *and* the world; it is between different ways of being in and of the movement of things; between a brute physical way and a purposive, intelligent way."[245] Scientific procedures, embedded in experience, are techniques for intelligently distinguishing between different courses of action.

Foucault helps Dewey on his path away from abstract considerations of "science" in the singular[246] toward looking at sciences: different technologies of knowing drawn by specific historical and material loops.[247] Dewey's talk of "science" and "the scientific method" as extensions of a unified process belies the sympathies he and Foucault share in this area. For both Dewey and Foucault, the sciences are bundles of procedures, actions, materials, and techniques in concrete settings. Dewey wishes to take up one such constellation of procedures, which he simply calls "science" or "scientific inquiry," for ethical, political, and social ends. In one sense, Foucault has

244 Ibid.

245 Ibid.

246 A tendency evident in the foregoing discussion.

247 See Latour, "Facing Gaia," Gifford Lectures, delivered February 18, 2013, 95.

little interest in this undertaking. He mounts a cautionary rejoinder to Dewey's enthusiasm for science by extending a point latent in Dewey: the various procedure-constellations that have been called "science" occur in specific historical milieux, where they structure what can be articulated as knowledge, and the structures they countenance are shot through with power relations both as historical artifacts and as constitutive features of the procedures by which they produce objectivity.[248]

In another sense, however, what motivates Dewey to draw on science as an ethical-political tool is also what motivates Foucault to draw on rights as an ethical-political tool. Science, like rights-talk,[249] like philosophical inquiry,[250] like the tools offered by Marxism or psychoanalysis,[251] is ultimately a method to "contrive ingeniously."[252] Dewey and Foucault approach science, rights, and theory, their other features notwithstanding, as means to be repurposed against intensifying power relations,[253] the rapacious exploitation of the working class by "a vicious and incompetent

248 See also Bruno Latour and Steve Woolgar, *Laboratory Life: The Construction of Scientific Facts* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 15-42, and Sandra Harding, "Rethinking Standpoint Theory" in *Feminist Epistemologies*, ed. Linda Alcoff and Elizabeth Potter (New York: Routledge, 1993), 49-82.

249 Golder, *Rights*, 21, 155-56.

250 Dewey, *Middle Works*, vol. 10, 48.

251 Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, (New York: Picador, 2003), 6.

252 Dewey, "Recovery," 68.

253 Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?" 48.

banking system,"[254] cowardice among leaders on the Left in the face of the erosion of asylum rights,[255] "illusions" that are "produced and circulated by those in power with a profusion that contrasts with their withholding of the necessities of life,"[256] governmental monopolies on "interven[ing] in the sphere of international policy and strategy,"[257] the continued coexistence "of piled up real wealth of food and goods with privation and poverty,"[258] and governments that "arrogate to themselves the right to pass off as profit or loss the human unhappiness that their decisions provoke or their negligence permits."[259]

A third point of contact between the thinkers arises when Dewey links the abandonment of "causal forces" in the natural sciences with the rejection of similarly dated ways of thinking in the social sciences.[260] Dewey describes how, in the history of science, "causal forces" like "a force of combustion; of intrinsic nisus toward this and that; of heaviness and levity," long thought to be essential features of the natural

254 Dewey, *Later Works*, vol. 9, 64.

255 Foucault, "Letter to Certain Leaders," 426-27.

256 Dewey, *Later Works*, vol. 9, 77.

257 Michel Foucault, "Confronting Governments: Human Rights," in *Essential Works of Foucault*, vol. 3, ed. J.D. Faubion (New York: Penguin, 1994), 475.

258 John Dewey, "Imperative Need: A New Radical Party," in *Later Works*, vol. 9, 76-77.

259 Foucault, "Confronting," 475. (So much for the idea that Dewey and Foucault lack concrete grievances.)

260 Dewey, *Conduct*, 149-50.

world, were instead condensations of "a variety of complex occurrences."[261] Specific phenomena were gobbled up by abstract formulations like "a force of levity" or "nature's abhorrence of a vacuum."[262] Dewey celebrates the move away from this way of thinking in the sciences, and works to bring about a similar shift in his philosophical and social work.

Foucault, meanwhile, writes that political philosophy still has not done away with an understanding of power as a substance possessed by sovereigns. Against this view, Foucault holds that "relationships of power have an extremely wide extension in human relations. There is a whole network of relationships of power, which can operate between individuals, in the bosom of the family, in an educational relationship, in the political body, etc."[263] Power relations aren't well-described by the types of monolithic theoretical regimes used to define (once and for all) enormous and elusive terms like Authority or Justice. Power is not held like a scepter or cursed ring. Power relations are better approached the way Newton thought of gravity, or Einstein of space-time: a range of reciprocal effects that can't be escaped, only described, manipulated, had their multiple instantiations experimented with.[264] Power

261 Ibid., 150.

262 Ibid., 149-50.

263 Michel Foucault, "The Ethic of Care for the Self as a Practice of Freedom," *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 12 (1987): 114.

264 A tongue-in-cheek way of stating this difference is that political theory should consider switching genres from fantasy to sci-fi.

wherever it's operative entails ways of resisting whatever it's doing just then, as a changing magnetic field cannot but generate an electric field.

There is, of course, no context-independent link between decomposing the sciences into a suite of procedures and devolving power into relational fields.[265] There are, however, analogous structures at play in the way Dewey and Foucault alter received understandings of science and power. Dewey, describing Darwin's influence on philosophy, religion, and the sciences, makes a preliminary version of this connection himself. He writes that before the advent of *The Origin of Species*, "nature" was understood to "do nothing in vain; but all for an ulterior purpose…. Within natural sensible events there is therefore contained a spiritual causal force… apprehended by an enlightened reason."[266] This "design argument" underpins the casuistry whose decline Dewey described earlier. The design viewpoint sustains not only causal forces as valid explanations in the sciences, but also their theological and philosophical correlates: "Purposefulness accounted for the intelligibility of nature; and the possibility of science, while the absolute, or cosmic character of this purposefulness gave sanction and worth to the moral and religious endeavors of man. Science was underpinned and morals authorized by one and the same principle, and their mutual

265 To be clear, I do not understand Dewey and Foucault's respective projects here as species of analytic dissection. They do not seek to better understand a preexisting monolith like power or science by parceling out its concrete parts and processes. Rather, they aim to transform and displace theoretical monoliths in favor of assemblages.

266 John Dewey, "The Influence of Darwin on Philosophy," in *The Influence of Darwin on Philosophy and Other Essays* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1910), 10.

agreement was eternally guaranteed."[267] By 1909, Dewey understands conceptual shifts in the sciences effected by Darwin to be linked with new technologies of understanding in philosophy and social inquiry. Dewey and Foucault's reformulations of science, power, rights, and social inquiry echo the Darwinian reshuffling in the sciences and philosophy. Foucault and Dewey both understand large theoretical objects as tenuously binding diverse phenomena that occur in experience. In response, they decompose *power* into concrete, local power relations, push *social inquiry* toward a set of techniques for intelligent action, use *rights* as a means for fabricating political and ethical claims, and splinter *science* into diverse sets of procedures and appliances set in concrete historical milieux available for creative repurposing by and for democratic ends.

There is some further ambiguity, however, about the relationship between Dewey and Foucault's respective treatments (or lack thereof) of power. That ambiguity concerns the extent to which Dewey's account of power, insofar as it can be extracted from him, stands on its own or whether it requires buttressing. The next section discusses what Foucault's account of power can contribute to Dewey.

267 Ibid., 10-11.

§2.1.4 Power

I argued in chapter one that it's not clear how Dewey's pragmatism answers questions of power. I discussed two attempts to draw a theory of power from Dewey, one by R.W. Hildreth and one by Joel Wolfe. Hildreth claims that Dewey's "experimental inquiry offers a potential source of critical reflection" and offers a "Deweyan conception" of power "as a complex capacity, defined by social customs and habits, and relative to the transactional fields of experience."[268] I argued that these formulations were not entirely native to Dewey, but instead Foucauldian, rendering Hildreth's claim to have drawn on exclusively Deweyan resources somewhat precarious. Wolfe, for his part, argues that Dewey's account of praxis naturally yields "a tacit theory of power."[269] For Wolfe, "Dewey's philosophical starting point centers on praxis and the ways human action makes differences within and through a social medium" so as to "in effect" offer "a tacit theory of power."[270] But, as I argued in chapter one, offering a nuanced, contextualized account of praxis and action is not the same as offering an account of power relations. Wolfe does not show how Dewey moves beyond sophisticated accounts of action in a social context to an analysis of power. Hildreth and Wolfe do, however, locate sites in Dewey's thought where a more robust analysis of power can attach and grow nerve endings. I'll focus on how Wolfe's reading of Dewey can be opened up and hooked into Foucault.

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268 Hildreth, "Reconstructing Dewey," 799.

269 Joel Wolfe, "Pragmatism," 124.

270 Ibid.

To support his argument that "Dewey's philosophical starting point centers on praxis and the ways human action makes differences within and through a social medium, in effect furnishing a tacit theory of power," Wolfe quotes Dewey's *Quest for Certainty*, where Dewey argues that

> when theories of values do not afford intellectual assistance in framing ideas and beliefs about values that are adequate to direct action, the gap must be filled by other means. If intelligent method is lacking, prejudice, the pressure of immediate circumstance, self-interest and class-interest, traditional customs, institutions of accidental historic origin, are not lacking, and they tend to take the place of intelligence. Thus we are led to our main proposition: Judgments about values are judgments about the conditions and the results of experienced objects; judgments about that which should regulate the formation of our desires, affections and enjoyments. For whatever decides their formation will determine the main course of our conduct, personal and social.[271]

Wolfe argues that this passage offers an "implicit" Deweyan account of power: "Examining what values control ways of functioning exposes what matters most and for what ends…. The structure of power, thus, arises from and can be analyzed by examining the ways actors operate to control events."[272] It remains unclear how, on Wolfe's reading, Dewey makes the jump from offering reflections about what is meant by "values," and the role these values play in "the formation of our desires, affections and enjoyments," to an analysis of power. Does Dewey, for example,

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271 Quoted in Wolfe, "Pragmatism," 128. Dewey's emphases removed.

272 Ibid.

intend that his reader understand the relationship between "the formation of our desires, affections and enjoyments" and "the main course of our conduct, personal and social" as involving operations that sustain systems of unequal relations between human beings? It seems that the most one can say here is *Well, possibly*. Foucault offers a lens for reinterpreting this paragraph and pushing forward Wolfe's effort to synthesize a Deweyan account of power.

A Foucauldian reading of the passage quoted above suggests that when Dewey worries that "prejudice, the pressure of immediate circumstance, self-interest and class-interest, traditional customs, institutions of accidental historic origin... tend to take the place of intelligence," he is not offering a general warning against bias in decision-making. Instead, Dewey offers means for understanding how actions to improve collective conditions occur within a field of power relations that composes and compromises these efforts to begin with.[273] When Dewey writes about "self-interest and class-interest [and] traditional customs" infiltrating the capacity for intelligent decision-making, this can be understood as an attempt to describe how structures of power condition ways of thinking that appeared neutral and how these altered ways of understanding play out in a social reality defined by shifting power relations. This Foucauldian rendering complicates some of Dewey's own assumptions about "intelligence" and theories of value "that are adequate to direct action." Dewey understands intelligent means for guiding action as defined by their insulation from

273 I believe Wolfe's argument is compatible with this point. See Wolfe, "Pragmatism," 129-131.

"circumstance, self-interest and class-interest, traditional customs, institutions of accidental historic origin."[274] Intelligence stands at least partially outside relations of power. This leads to an approach to decision-making where the primary objective is to insulate intelligence from the operations of power—to find an incorruptible procedure for intelligent discernment. This leads Dewey in the direction of political and social theories premised on just/unjust, moral/immoral, upstanding/corrupt divisions and the defense of what is understood to fall on the proper side of those divisions.

To read Dewey through Foucault is to imagine intelligence and power as intermingled rather than in mutual isolation. Dewey's intelligent methods of action can be understood to inhabit the same space as the corrupting influences he fears. "Intelligence" and "prejudice, the pressure of immediate circumstance, self-interest and class-interest, traditional customs, institutions of accidental historic origin" are active within the same practices, woven into and from the same psychic and hylic fabrics. Intelligent methods for developing courses of action are generated and textured by circumstance and structures of power. This does not mean that critical applications of intelligence are impossible. On the contrary, recognizing the ways that intelligence is bound up with structures of power allows for a more nuanced approach to intelligent action in a social field formed and deformed by shifting power relations.

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274 Ibid.

Recognizing power as ever-present in intelligent discernment weakens Dewey's tendency to insulate "intelligence" or "growth" from the corrupting influences that infiltrate it. A theory of the social premised, however implicitly, on insulating intelligent means of decision-making from corrupting influences isn't just unsatisfying. Because it misses the ways that intelligence is veined with power from its inception,[275] such an account sustains fairy tales about the purity of leftist causes that leave radicals forever surprised and hurt when radical movements fail or are coöpted. If you understand the core of your political efforts to be pure (and, more, if you understand this purity as operatively important such that losing your pure status is the same as losing full stop), then when this core turns out to involve compromise, grit, ugliness, people you'd rather not share a cab with, setbacks, crushing defeats, wet handshakes, and people who take concepts you imagine yourself to have reared and use them for things you consider cheap or counterproductive, you are inclined to find increasingly artful and recondite ways of embellishing your defeat so as to save your purity.[276] You may even take to redescribing defeats so as to make them feel even more devastating, lest anyone get one over on you.[277]

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275 "Veined as I am with iron, with silver and streaks of common mud, I cannot contract into the firm fist which those clench who do not depend upon stimulus…. I shall never succeed, even in talk, in making a perfect phrase. But I shall have contributed more to the passing moment than any of you; I shall go into more rooms, more different rooms, than any of you." Virginia Woolf, *The Waves* (Hertfordshire, UK: Wordsworth, 2000), 74.

276 Relevant here is the link between dichotomous thinking and relapse in the cognitive-behavioral therapy literature: "A particularly potent [factor that rendered clients vulnerable to relapse] was a dichotomous, or 'all or nothing,' interpretation of a setback. They observed that clients who perceived themselves as *either* being in control *or* having failed tended to relapse at the first sign of

Dewey's account of the social is not just fruitfully supplemented by Foucault's account of power. It requires it for its own conceptual coherence and to avoid forfeiting its political and ethical aims. It is pragmatism's estrangement from power relations, not its proximity, that threatens pragmatic visions of a plural society. The popular observation that Dewey is "waiting at the end of the road" that Foucault has been traveling[278] can be inverted. Foucault's analysis of power extends back into Dewey's account of society, reinvigorating Dewey and making possible a stronger pragmatism, a power-sensitive pragmatism. What the tautological definition of power pragmatism as a "pragmatism that pays attention to power relations" means as a practical matter is something like sedulous attention to the concrete feedback loops that sustain a situation (rather than abstractions arrayed in a conceptual field) that interrogates the ways that power deforms and conditions this sort of analysis to begin with. Please note the relation between the first and second parts of this definition. Power pragmatism does not reduce to "pay attention to feedback loops, also power."

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difficulty: these clients flipped form feeling in control to feeling as though they had failed completely. Once in the 'failure' mindset, they tended to be dominated by a sense of hopelessness which drove unhelpful behaviours…. Instead, Marlatt and Gordon encouraged them to develop a continuous notion of being in control and slipping out of control, which could accommodate minor and even significant setbacks without the client automatically assuming failure." See David Westbrook et al., *An Introduction to Cognitive Behaviour Therapy*, 2nd ed. (New York: SAGE Publications, 2009), 122-135.

277 Sedgwick, "Paranoid Reading," 142-44.

278 Richard Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), xviii; Larry Hickman, *Pragmatism as Post-postmodernism* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), 2.

Attending to power relations becomes a reflexive mechanism of oversight and feedback operative within pragmatist analysis. It functions as a kind of fallibilist self-awareness that guards, however imperfectly, against pragmatism's slipping into incrementalism, the mere ratification of dominant interests, cooptation, and so on.

In any event, the definition "pragmatism sensitive to power relations" does very little on its own, and I hope, in true pragmatist fashion, you won't pay too much attention to it in isolation. Like all of us, it depends on being injected into a concrete situation to come alive.[279] I turn to one such situation in chapter four, which argues that attention to critical infrastructure is a necessary component of radial politics.

§2.2 Power pragmatism, realism, and cognitive-behavioral theory

This final section—more of a coda, really—looks at two side-stories in the intellectual history of political theory from a power-pragmatist perspective. These two stories are (i) a professed attention to the "real world" that appears in the conclusions of published work in political theory and (ii) the longstanding circuit of exchange between psychoanalytic theory and social theory. The first story has been alluded to in the introduction. It has to do with how small-r "realism" in theory highlights an orientation—shared by a variety of otherwise quite different theorists—characterized

[279] "The difference pragmatism makes," Cornel West argues, "is always the difference people make with it." See West, *Evasion*, 181.

by a modest, even prosaic, interest in what happens in the world. The unassuming, straightforward nature of this concern generally sits suspended in mild tension with the sophisticated and technically-difficult work undertaken by these books. The two lie apart, like flies on opposite corners of a web. Power pragmatism might, I suggest, work to generate a means of better navigating the strands of silk between the two. The second story is simpler: political theory has long exchanged ideas with psychoanalytic theory. These exchanges have often been fruitful. If political theorists now wanted to turn their attention to other schools of thought within psychotherapy, they might do well to explore what cognitive-behavioral theory has to offer. Hence: cognitive-behavioral political theory.

§2.2.1 Realism in political theory

What's the relationship between a pragmatism attentive to power relations and "realist" political theory? What makes a political theory realist, anyway? Raymond Geuss and William A. Galston's work on theoretical realism[280] sheds some light in this area. Geuss and Galston posit a "realist" trend in political theory that spans

> Bernard Williams, Stuart Hampshire, John Dunn, Glen Newey, Richard Bellamy, Geoffrey Hawthorne, and John Gray, who are critical of what they regard as the moralism, legalism, and parochialism of American liberal theory; 'left Nietzscheans,' mainly American, such as William Connolly and Bonnie Honig; Machiavellians such as Chantal Mouffe and (in a different register) Mark Philp… some scholars influenced by Quentin Skinner and the

280 Raymond Geuss, *Philosophy and Real Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008); William A. Galston, "Realism in Political Theory," Brookings Institution draft, 2007.

> 'Cambridge historical school'; Judith Shklar, and her many admirers who endorse her anti-utopian skepticism… majoritarian democrats such as Jeremy Waldron… and finally, a small embattled band of American political scientists, Stephen Elkin chief among them.[281]

For these small-r realists, the "high liberalism" of Rawls, Dworkin, and their hierophants "evades" rather than theorizes politics.[282] As noted in the introduction, the realists—against attempts to construct ideal theories of politics and other attempts to abstract and decontextualize political situations in pursuit of formulas for justice that transcend historical, material, and cultural contexts—emphasize attention to the actual conditions in which politics occurs. This realist tradition is diverse, but its hallmarks include an interest in the operations of power, the deep contextualization (rather than abstraction) of political problems, and attention to the "actual outcomes" of a given course of action or way of thinking.[283]

In contemporary political theory, this realist attention to context, power, and outcomes often hides in plain sight. Consider how often published work in political theory concludes with a turn toward lived experience. Even if a work's central argument revolves around sophisticated ontological claims or debates over the mistranslation of a prefix in the footnotes to an abstruse text, its author will nevertheless close by appealing to the need "to heighten care for the world and the

281 Galston, "Realism," 1.

282 Ibid., 1-3.

283 Geuss, *Real*, 10-16.

sweetness of life amid the dangers,"[284] to "distort the present on behalf of what the present can become,"[285] "to ensure the meeting of needs and to foster human flourishing,"[286] "to bring about a new configuration of the world,"[287] "to take better care of things, ourselves, and others,"[288] and to work so that history "might be made in a more reasonable, less violent way."[289]

My point here is not to sneer at these appeals. (On the contrary.) These gestures are not empty. But why do they live, by and large, in political theory's concluding paragraphs? Why do they so often mark a shift in the work's tone and, sometimes, its stated aims? As Diana Coole—whose quote ends the foregoing list—acknowledges, her own close feels "like a rather modest and prosaic conclusion after the long digression through ontology."[290] A more jaded (or efficient) reader might object at

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284 William E. Connolly, *Capitalism and Christianity, American Style* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 146.

285 Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 263.

286 Tony Monchinski, *Education in Hope: Critical Pedagogies and the Ethic of Care* (Baltimore: Peter Lang, 2010), 189.

287 Samuel Chambers, *The Lessons of Rancière* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 169.

288 Paul Rabinow, *Anthropos Today* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 136.

289 Diana Coole, *Merleau-Ponty and Modern Politics after Anti-Humanism* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 255. In addition to the conclusion poetry just reeled off, realist frames of reference lie implicit in references to alternative economies in J.K. Gibson-Graham's *Postcapitalist Politics*, Connolly's ethos of critical responsiveness in *The Ethos of Pluralization*, or in the "cryptonormative" commitments Habermas accuses Foucault of harboring (see *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, 270-276). In a sense, Habermas only chose the wrong prefix. What is interesting about Foucault's commitments is not their clandestine status, but what their actual content might be.

290 Ibid.

this point: This isn't all that interesting. You've simply isolated a general feature of conclusions. Every writer has a "conclusion voice" she puts on, like a gown at commencement, to fill out the end of talks, books, and eulogies. She says that she hopes the future will be better and we all ought to live more peacefully together and so forth. They're throwaway lines—don't read too much into them.

On the contrary, the practice of conclusion poetry seems indispensable to me. These ethical-political confessions are most interesting for how they, gathered together, begin to sketch a solution set that theorists with otherwise divergent methodologies converge on, perhaps the only "consensus position" to be found in political theory. What does this consensus position, this cluster of exhortations, consist of? Coole describes her own conclusion as "modest and prosaic." These two attributes characterize much of the closing exhortations. They are prosaic when they invoke in style and substance the everyday, what is common, what is present here and now. Their modesty surfaces when they relax high-flown ontological ambitions, streamline recondite epistemological arguments, invite high abstraction to visit the level of lived experience. Coole calls this a kind of "practical radicalism."[291] You might call it pragmatic.

As it turns out, Galston and Geuss's realism captures central features of the inconsistently-articulated cluster of positions expressed by different theorists in the conclusions to their books and articles. The more one attempts to tease out what

291 Ibid.

these claims and exhortations have in common, the more their underlying orientations and commitments come to resemble those of power pragmatism. Theoretical realism meets power pragmatism where it offers an alternative conception of the relationship between politics and theory: one that is heuristic, limited, problem-oriented, concerned about the real operations of power, and interested in abstractions only insofar as they lead to or make possible certain real outcomes. The "consensus position" at the center of contemporary political theory, then, is not a far-reaching solution to deep questions about the nature of justice or authority, but rather a kind of everyday pragmatism, Coole's "practical radicalism."[292] This claim is intertextually broad, but also involute: it gets at what we have in mind when we describe a political theory as "realist" or ask if someone is concerned about "the real world." Why ask about the relationship between theory and politics, or about the connection between ethical frameworks and the way human lives are carried out? Power pragmatism functions in part as a set of tools for locating, substantiating, and understanding what is being referred to or relied upon by ethical appeals to better versions of the real world.[293]

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292 Coole, *Merleau-Ponty*, 255. This is not to say that everyone in the critical-theoretical academic constellation is aiming at precisely the same normative goals, all neutrally discoverable via consensus. More interesting is the resemblance among the concrete aims and procedures of those whose theoretical-abstract elaborations and defenses of their positions vary widely, and what those shared procedures and aims augur. Venn-diagram political theory.

293 There is also an underexplored difference between falling into political-realism-as-acquiescence and making a focused attempt to enact a critical, radical political realism. Here is Ezra Klein's take:

§2.2.2 Cognitive-behavioral political theory

One way to express the realist dimensions of power pragmatism is to explore the idea of a "cognitive-behavioral political theory." In psychotherapy, cognitive-behavioral theory (CBT) describes

> a broad class of present-focused interventions with a shared focus on changing *cognition* (thoughts, beliefs, and assumptions about the world), changing *behavior*, and building clients' *coping skills*. Cognitive theory focuses on the rationality of one's thinking patterns and the connections between thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Behavior theory is not concerned with internal mental processes but rather how human behavior, whether adaptive or problematic, is developed, sustained, or eliminated through its external *reinforcement*. The nature of change in cognitive-behavioral theory is apparent in its hyphenated term. That is, clients can be helped to change in three ways: 1) cognitively, by teaching them how to identify and change distorted thinking; 2) behaviorally, by offering skills training to improve coping capability; and 3) experientially, by helping clients set up natural experiments so they can test the extent to which their beliefs about an event are rational.[294]

> A lot of the [politicians] defending "political realism" are not good messengers for their case. They don't believe in it as an actual good approach to politics. It's just kind of what they've been doing.… If political realism is to be saved from the political realists, you're gonna need people who advocate it not because it is the thing they've fallen into over a long career in which they have allowed themselves to get pretty appropriated by the political establishment. You're gonna need people who come to it itself as a more exciting, philosophically interesting proposal.

(Transcribed from discussion, *The Weeds*, Feb 12, 2016, 59:50 timestamp.)

294 Jacqueline Corcoran, *Building Strengths and Skills: A Collaborative Approach to Working with Clients* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 36. Emphases in original.

This passage expresses many of pragmatism's central tenets, including a reconstructive approach to thought and action, an account of selves as constituted by habits and trends of conduct, an interest in present-focused coping, the invocation of experience and experimentation, and attention to the way broader forces (e.g., currents of power) do not merely constrain but also constitute the behaviors that make selves and those selves' capability to engage in meliorative work. Where psychoanalytic approaches might understand "neuroses" in terms of abstract links or conduits between structures of desire or childhood experiences and present disorders,[295] CBT is inclined to understand dysfunctional modes of thought and behavior in terms of concrete patterns and the possibility of disrupting those patterns. Mark Williams gives the example of a client whose depression is linked with a belief that she is "never any good in any social encounter… that no-one really wants to know her."[296] Where a psychoanalyst might relate this belief back to unconscious psychic structures shaped by childhood experiences, a cognitive-behavioral therapist is more inclined to undertake collaborative strategies like task assignment and reality testing. A task-assignment-and-reality-testing approach "involves generating experiments that can treat such thoughts ['no one wants to get to know me'] as experimental predictions" amenable to testing. This testing can be carried out in real-world situations. A client might be asked to consider "what might she do before the

295 Theodore Shapiro and Robert N. Emde, *Research in Psychoanalysis* (Connecticut: International Universities Press, 1995), 69-70, 112-114.

296 J. Mark G. Williams, "Depression," in *Science and Practice of Cognitive Behavior Therapy*, ed. David M. Clark and Christopher G. Fairburn (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 265-66.

next session that could test out either idea [and to] predict what might happen… what might go wrong, and what would she do if it did. The next session would then check whether the list of difficulties the client foresaw actually happened, or whether other unforeseen difficulties arose."[297] Reality testing can also be carried out in part via thought experiments "in which the client anticipates each detail of trying to carry out a task, such as going out with friends…. Each of the 'roadblocks' that have become evident during the rehearsal may now be discussed, and each may become the target of its own task assignment…. Each of these sub-tasks, although they appear insignificant, may turn out to be an important block to progress, and should not be minimized."[298]

Though its differences with psychoanalysis are clear, CBT does not wholly reject psychodynamic approaches to therapy. Indeed, handbooks on the CBT approach to depression include the technique of "dealing with underlying fears and assumptions," which involves "investigat[ing] the way in which dysfunctional schemata and assumptions have built up over a lifetime, and how they influence day-to-day thinking…. The history of how such a fear or assumption [e.g., 'Everyone must like me, or I can't be happy'] has grown up and been reinforced through the client's

297 Williams, "Depression," 265.

298 Ibid., 266. The difference between this kind of thought experiment and pernicious abstraction-generalization described below (*q.v.* note 314) suggests that merely because you operate within the domain of thought and writing does not mean you are doomed to abstraction.

experience of relationships at home, school, and college will be discussed."[299] *Pace* strict behaviorists, this approach implicitly involves a psychodynamic understanding of dysfunction. Incorporating psychoanalysis in this partial, local way—as a specific technique—recalls Foucault and Dewey's reappropriation of conceptual or institutional monoliths (rights, philosophy, science) as specific techniques with local application.

Dewey, writing before the development of cognitive-behavioral therapy, argued that "even so 'scientific' a theory as modern psycho-analysis thinks that mental habits can be straightened out by some kind of purely psychical manipulation without reference to the distortions of sensation and perception which are due to bad bodily sets. The other side of the error [in psychotherapy] is found in the notion of 'scientific' nerve physiologists that it is only necessary to locate a particular diseased cell or local lesion, independent of the whole complex of organic habits, in order to rectify conduct."[300] Political theory has tried the talking cure for a century, but the manipulation and remanipulation of symbols is as insufficient an approach as limiting oneself to crude alterations of the physical. As J.K. Gibson-Graham found in the Latrobe Valley, "rather than working mainly with language and discourse and counting on that to release and redirect affect, we found that with these groups… marginalized by economic restructuring… we needed to directly address embodied, habitual, and

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[299] Williams, "Depression," 265-67.

300 Dewey, *Conduct*, 33-35.

emotional practices of being."[301] Roderick J. Watts further argues that "in CBT, we find a technique for transforming how people think about the world, one that has enjoyed extensive empirical validation, yet no one has systematically applied it to the 'treatment' of internalized oppression and the strengthening of critical consciousness."[302] What does a cognitive-behavioral political theory look like?

This question is best approached by untangling a few of the difficulties cognitive-behavioral political theory faces. While the parallels between cognitive-behavioral theory and power pragmatism may be strong, dangers and disanalogies sprout like weeds. Accusations of overestimating the rational capacities of autonomous subjects, which dog classical pragmatism, can be leveled against the cognitive-behavioral emphasis on subjects learning to more objectively evaluate their patterns of thought and action.[303] CBT's status as a therapy, intended for the treatment of a client within a given set of material, social, and professional parameters, generates further issues. Who or what is the object of "treatment" for cognitive-behavioral political theory?

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301 Gibson-Graham, *Postcapitalist*, 152.

302 Roderick J. Watts, "Integrating Social Justice and Psychology," *The Counseling Psychologist* 32, no. 6 (2004): 855-865.

303 To be fair, Beck and Weishaar distance cognitive therapy from forms of therapy like rational emotive behavior therapy (REBT) that emphasize rationality. They note that "REBT theory states that a distressed individual has irrational beliefs that contribute to irrational thoughts and that when these are modified… they will disappear and disorder will clear up. The cognitive therapist, operating from an inductive model, helps the patient translate interpretations and beliefs into hypotheses, which are then subjected to empirical testing. An REBT therapist is more inclined to use a deductive model to point out irrational beliefs. The cognitive therapist eschews the word *irrational* in favor of *dysfunctional* because problematic beliefs are nonadaptive rather than irrational." See Aaron T. Beck and Marjorie E. Weishaar, "Cognitive Therapy," in *Current Psychotherapies*, ed. Raymond J. Corsini and Danny Wedding (Belmont, CA: Thomson, 2008), 265-66.

Society? That's impossibly broad. A given "problematic situation"? Those who engage in reactionary patterns of thought and action? Baldwin's "well-meaning" white student who claims to have "lost [his] conscience"?[304] What's the analogue of the therapist? Is it a community organizer? That seems too narrow. A political theorist? That seems too convenient. Some cross-section of human and nonhuman actants in a given problematic situation? Certain disanalogies will persist because the conceptual link between psychotherapy and political theory involves reference to incompatible structures and relations from the outset.

However, a pragmatist dissolving of several dichotomies can help. Cognitive-behavioral theory is especially useful for navigating situations in which victim and perpetrator live in the same body. In psychotherapy, this invokes therapeutic procedures having to do with self-harm, destructive thought patterns, self-defeating behaviors, depression, and so forth. Transported to political theory, these procedures become a new set of tools for untangling the recursive dimensions of political and social problems. Food insecurity, police violence, climate change, income inequality, sexism, and other systemic ills involve antagonists and protagonists who share the same social (and, sometimes, physical) body, who mutually co-constitute the same problematic situation, whose action and interaction sustain the feedback loops by which a situation is remade time and again. Much of the work of adapting advances in cognitive-behavioral therapy to political life consists in scrambling the division

304 Baldwin, *Fire*, 70.

between therapist and client.[305] Instead of rigid divisions between healer and healed, envision currents of damage and recovery that cross and inhabit human bodies, actor-networks, and material-social-psychological feedback loops.

Still, psychotherapy starts with individual minds as its object of treatment, and so resists being extended to wider social and material spheres. Any application of cognitive-behavioral political theory will be somewhat catachrestic, like saying "the crowd remembers its grandma." To think through this objection, it helps to ask what cognitive-behavioral therapy takes as its object of treatment. Beck and Weishaar write that cognitive-behavioral therapy involves "discovering what threads run through the patient's present misperceptions and beliefs and linking them to analogous experiences in the past…. The immediate goal is to shift the information processing apparatus to a more neutral condition so that events will be evaluated in a more balanced way."[306] When "dysfunctional modes"[307] are identified, cognitive therapy seeks to "(1) deactivate them, (2) modify their content and structure, and (3) construct more adaptive modes to neutralize them."[308] In essence, CBT aims to identify feedback loops that reproduce and deepen structures that sustain a disorder.

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305 Certain CBT writers start down this path, departing from visions of a heroic analyst in favor of a collaborative approach. See Williams, "Depression," 266.

306 Beck and Weishaar, "Cognitive," 264-65.

307 At a societal level, think of dysfunctional modes as the sorts of feedback loops that, e.g., widen income inequality, retrench white supremacy, or paralyze the ability of a technologically-advanced civilization to respond to climate change.

308 Beck and Weishaar, "Cognitive," 264-65.

Once these feedback loops have been identified, they can be disrupted, recomposed, or supplemented with more favorable relays. Understanding feedback loops as the primary site of intervention in cognitive-behavioral therapy increases the portability of its techniques to political and social theory. An analysis of feedback loops scales well: there's no longer any need to gather nervously, like preliterate hunters encircling a mammoth, around a lumbering and ill-defined object of analysis like "modernity" or "sovereignty" or "violence." As a given situation, trend, or idea is broken down into linked self-reproducing circuits comprised of human and nonhuman elements, it grows more amenable to cognitive-behavioral analysis and intervention. The specific cycles of behavior and cognition that constitute the operative, self-renewing core of a system of oppression, say, are subject to disruption and reconstruction in ways that a catch-all like "society" or "human nature" is not.[309] Reconstructing the cognitive and behavioral constituents of self-reproducing and reinforcing circuits produces ripple effects that propagate through other feedback loops with connections (antagonistic, mutually reinforcing, resonant) to the remade circuit. These ripples spread, propagating through and reformulating networks of behavior, cognition, material flows, "nonhuman force fields,"[310] and institutional structures, transforming existing

309 See again Latour's criticism of "social stuff" in *Reassembling the Social*.

310 William E. Connolly, *The Fragility of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 25-31, 36, 105.

feedback loops and creating new relays.[311] These new loops and relays generate further ripples, which produce new moirés of interference and amplification.

A longstanding circuit of exchange exists between psychoanalytic theory and social theory. Why is there no corresponding trade deal between cognitive-behavioral theory and political theory? There are contingent and historical reasons, to be sure: CBT has risen to prominence only in the last few decades, and "behavioral" is still a swear word in certain circles of social science. There is also the answer that cognitive-behavioral therapy is light on theory proper. The quotidian cognitive-behavioral business of assigning insomniacs homework[312] or giving suicidal soldiers "reasons for living" cards[313] stands at distance from profound theoretical work. In psychoanalysis,

311 This sort of cognitive-behavioral propagation across nested feedback loops allows us to understand phenomena like the way that curbing police violence and industrial pollution in communities of color leads to more black and Latino doctors admitted to medical school and thence to better healthcare outcomes for poor patients of color. See Michelle L. Bell and Keita Ebisu, "Environmental Inequality in Exposures to Airborne Particulate Matter Components in the United States," *Environmental Health Perspectives* 120 (2012):1699–1704; Jean Anyon, *Radical Possibilities: Public Policy, Urban Education, and A New Social Movement* (New York: Routledge, 2005); Phillippe Grandjean and Philip J. Landrigan, "Neurobehavioural effects of developmental toxicity," *Lancet Neurology* 13 (2014): 330–38; Raquel R. Cabral and Timothy B. Smith, "Racial/Ethnic Matching of Clients and Therapists in Mental Health Services: A Meta-Analytic Review of Preferences, Perceptions, and Outcomes," *Journal of Counseling Psychology* 58, no. 4, (2011): 537–554; David R. Levy, "White doctors and black patients: influence of race on the doctor-patient relationship," *Pediatrics* 75 (1985): 639–43; John Hoberman, *Black and Blue*: *The Origins and Consequences of Medical Racism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

312 Beck and Weishaar, "Cognitive," 288-89.

313 M. David Rudd, "Brief Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (BCBT) for Suicidality in Military Populations," *Military Psychology* 24 (2012): 592–603.

the theoretical apparatus[314] rises front and center, suggesting itself to social theorists. It seems a shame, however, for political theory to continue choosing the intellectual enterprises with which it exchanges DNA on the basis of assumptions of congruence between high-flown theories in one discipline and high-flown theories in another. It seems, also, a shame for political theory to deemphasize the necessity of everyday gestures like carrying a laminated card with a list of reasons to continue living.[315]

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314 Apropos here is CBT's exploration of the relationship between abstraction and the inability to disrupt maladaptive thought patterns and behaviors:

> Mood and cognition spiral at times when there is no contrary information to interrupt the cycle or where the information that would normally interrupt it is accessed in a form which is too abstract or insufficiently detailed or imageable…. in the absence of sufficiently concrete alternative criteria, mood is itself used as the criterion of truth of a self-statement…. Depressed people are more likely to be over-general in their memories…. A large number of studies have found that depressed patients are more likely to respond to [memory] cues not by giving specific events (e.g., going for a walk last Tuesday) but by giving generic statements that summarize events (e.g., going for walks).

Williams and others argue that "generic encoding and retrieval of events may inhibit reinterpretation and reschematization of the past… [and] has implications for problem-solving…. For example, [depressed patients] do not generate as many alternative solutions as non-depressed people do and what alternatives they do generate tend to be less effective (as rated by an independent judge) than those generated by non-depressed individuals." One implication of this last point is that something like "left melancholy" is not "just" an emotional or aesthetic issue, but a tactical one. See Williams, "Depression," 275-78.

315 Ibid., 600.

§2.3 Bridge to chapter three

In this chapter, I have discussed the ways Dewey and Foucault come together over issues of profundity, tragedy, futurity, scientific inquiry, and power. I have used these encounters to suggest some basic positions and dispositions constitutive of and amenable to a power pragmatist outlook: anti-profundity, impurity, tragic meliorism, instrumentalism, and an inbuilt analysis of power relations. I offered a formulation of power pragmatism as involving attention to concrete situations and the cycles that sustain those situations rather than turf wars over how abstractions ought to be linked in a conceptual field, and argued that concrete attention should be at once the instrument and object of an analysis of power. Moreover, I have suggested connections between a pragmatism that pays attention to power and realist tendrils in contemporary political theory, and begun to explore what a cognitive-behavioral political theory might look like.

In chapter three, I turn to Shulamith Firestone as an example of a power pragmatist approach to science, technology, and society.

Chapter three

§3.1 Applying power pragmatism

How can power pragmatism be applied to a specific context or way of thinking? In this chapter, I bring to light underappreciated aspects of Shulamith Firestone's *Dialectic of Sex*, arguing that her understanding of science is a pragmatic one, and that her proposed use of nascent technologies to regender the future enacts a thoroughgoing power-pragmatism in its attention to actual feedback loops that sustain systems of domination and in its radical repurposing of material and technical resources to disrupt these feedback loops.

§3.2 Firestone's future

"For the first time in some countries," Firestone writes on the first page of *The Dialectic of Sex*, "the preconditions for feminist revolution exist."316 What does this mean? What does Firestone understand the preconditions for feminist revolution to be? Why have these preconditions only come into being circa 1970, the year Firestone is writing? And how is Firestone's cryptic extension of this claim, that "the situation is beginning to *demand* such a revolution," different from similar calls in earlier (and later) feminist work?

316 Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex* (New York: William Morrow, 1970), 1.

The difference, for Firestone, is that advances in reproductive technology have made it possible to liberate women from reproductive labor in the same way advances in automation have made it possible to reduce the demands productive labor makes on workers. "The double curse, that man should till the soil by the sweat of his brow, and that woman should bear in pain and travail," she writes, "would be lifted through technology to make humane living, for the first time, a possibility."317 When Firestone writes about the "preconditions for feminist revolution," she signals the idiosyncratic way that she views the possibility of social change. For her, the social field is bound up with material, biological, and technological forces. To a post-Haraway readership, this is practically a platitude, but Firestone meant this observation to redirect feminism in a particular way. For her, feminism must make claims about "changing a fundamental biological condition." Feminism has to target biological fundaments because "Nature produced the fundamental inequality—half the human race must bear and rear the children of all of them—which was later consolidated, institutionalized, in the interests of men. Reproduction of the species cost women dearly, not only emotionally, psychologically, culturally but even in strictly material (physical) terms: before recent methods of contraception, continuous childbirth led to constant 'female trouble,' early aging, and death. Women… maintained the species in order to free the other half for the business of the

317 Ibid., 230-31.

world."318 Contemporary systems of oppression descend from an originary biological distribution of reproductive labor between men and women.

Firestone's invocation of "a fundamental biological condition" recalls feminist debates about sameness and difference. Are biological differences between men and women to be understood as strengths rather than weaknesses, or were these so-called "biological differences" a sham to begin with?319 Does any appeal to "nature" and a language of biological difference invoke a vocabulary of and for domination? Firestone's response to the question at the heart of sameness/difference debates ("has nature made women inferior?") is, in effect, "if nature is unjust, change nature."320 The directness of this answer belies the sophisticated way Firestone thinks about the social conditions of women with respect to their biological and material conditions of existence. Instead of a sameness/difference frame of reference in which biology stands outside (in the sense of being prior or unalterable in many difference accounts and being unknowable or amorphous in sameness accounts), Firestone combines the best insights of each tradition: biology is a materially, technologically, and socially constructed entity, a sort of iterated practice and labor, but it is also real and knowable, with concrete effects.

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318 Ibid., 232.

319 Joan C. Williams, "Dissolving The Sameness/Difference Debate: A Post-Modern Path Beyond Essentialism in Feminist and Critical Race Theory," *Duke Law Journal* (1991): 296-323.

320 This phrase belongs to Laboria Cuboniks, "Xenofeminism: A Politics for Alienation," June 11, 2015, http://uberty.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/xenofeminism.pdf.

Firestone's recommendation, then, is to treat the biological conditions for oppression as malleable in the same way feminist thought has understood the cultural and institutional components of oppression to be open to contestation. This undertaking requires feminist interest in actual technoscientific procedures. Parthenogenesis, hormonal contraception, male birth control, in vitro fertilization, vasectomies, and intrauterine contraceptives all enter the fold as tools and techniques central to the project of feminist revolution, supplementing leaflets, voting, picketing, consciousness raising, and other forms of traditional activism. Engaging with technoscientific procedures demands that feminists take a keen interest not only in the sciences, but in the interrelations among science, technology, society, and the limits and powers of flesh. Understanding these interrelations further requires an end to an analysis of social totalities and movements as sufficient unto themselves,321 as partially insulated from—or having an expectation of being oppressed by—technological change and the physicality of bodies.

321 And, further, an end to analyses that claim to have determined the success or failure of a given movement via conceptual or abstract terms alone. Consider the line of thinking that Occupy Wall Street "failed" because it was distracted by antiracist and feminist causes. In fact, Occupy's ending is not a high mystery that can only be uncloaked by sophisticated theoretical analysis. Occupy ended when the New York Police Department (and scores of police departments in other cities) surrounded and cleared Zuccotti Park in the early hours of November 15th with truncheons and flex cuffs. A complex of material factors contributed most directly to the end of Occupy's fall 2011 campaign, not some corruption of leftist thought susceptible to intellectual purification rituals. Insofar as there were ideational factors at play, these had more to do with reactionary maxims being put to real work (you can always pay one half of the working class to kill the other half) than with intellectual weakness among the arrested. As Nina Power argues, "If the left lacks ideas and is forced to operate in a scarce world, both conceptually and materially, it is because of the sheer amount of time and resources ploughed into keeping it this way." See Nina Power, "Decapitalism," *Fillip* 20 (2015).

Ultimately, Firestone envisions a future in which material and biological changes made possible by new technics can be used to dissolve family relations at the root. New reproductive technologies can eliminate pregnancy and childbirth, allowing the family to be replaced by a new set of relationships Firestone calls the "household." Households would be comprised of ten or so friends, strangers, comrades. Women would no longer bear and raise a child within a nuclear family headed by a husband. Instead, children would be brought up, in these households, by "ten or so consenting adults of varying ages."322 These adults would share in childrearing: "(minimal) responsibility for the early physical dependence of children would be evenly diffused among all members of the household."323 Reconstructing the family in this way leads to "the end of family chauvinism, built up over generations, of prejudices passed down from one generation to the next, the inclusion of people of all ages in the childrearing process, the integration of many age groups into one social unit, the breadth of personality that comes from exposure to many rather to… few, and so on."324 In a limited sense, this household structure is compatible with natural childbirth (as long as children have no privileged connection with their birth parents),

322 Firestone, *Dialectic*, 262-63.

323 Ibid., 263. Firestone includes "(minimal)" because, for her, children are generally over-reared within the family structure. Children ought to be afforded more autonomy earlier.

324 Ibid.

but as long as natural childbirth exists, not even "the 'household' can be a totally liberating social form."325

Biological motherhood inflicts pain and instills possessiveness. "A mother who undergoes a nine-month pregnancy," Firestone writes, "is likely to feel that the product of all that pain and discomfort 'belongs' to her…. But we want to destroy this possessiveness along with its cultural reinforcements so that no one child will be *a priori* favored over another, so that children will be loved for their own sake."326 The effects of dissolving possessiveness ripple through society and radiate through generations:

> Adult/child relationships would develop just as they do today: some adults might prefer certain children over others [and vice versa]—these might become lifelong attachments in which the individuals concerned mutually agreed to stay together, perhaps to form some kind of non-reproductive unit…. All relationships would be based on love… uncorrupted by objective dependencies and the resulting class inequalities. Enduring relationships between people of widely divergent ages would become common.327

As technical know-how and social comfort with alternative birthing techniques increase, "childbearing could be taken over by technology."328 Advances in "modern embryology" will be used to "revolt against the biological family."329

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325 Ibid.

326 Ibid.

327 Ibid., 264.

328 Ibid., 270.

§3.3 Firestone and science

Firestone is often understood as something of a biological and technological determinist—a forerunner of contemporary techno-utopianism in second-wave feminist clothing. As Sarah Franklin writes, "the famous Firestone fallacy appears primarily to circulate as a cautionary tale against all manners of theoretical errors—from technological determinism and biological essentialism to 1970s feminist political naiveté."[330] Consider Maria Mies's warnings in the 1980s about the "technocratic illusion many feminists pursue in the wake of Shulamith Firestone." She warns that those who follow Firestone "think the new reproductive technology and genetics could, if they were in the control of women be used for finally abolishing men…. These women not only fail to realize that economic/political and military power is not in the hands of Lesbians.... Ultimately, all these arguments are based on a biologistic interpretation of a historical and social relationship."[331] Juliet Mitchell continues this argument when she writes that "Firestone's argument for test-tube babies illustrates the absence of procreative relationships within the rise of

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329 Ibid., 233-270.

330 Sarah Franklin, "Revisiting Reprotech: Firestone and the Question of Technology" in *Further Adventures of* The Dialectic of Sex*: Critical Essays on Shulamith Firestone*, ed. Mandy Merck and Stella Sandford (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010), 30.

331 Maria Mies, "'Why Do We Need All This?': A Call Against Genetic Engineering and Reproductive Technology," *Women's Studies International Forum* 8 (1985): 553-560; quoted in Franklin, "Reprotech," 30-31. *Sic.*

reproductive technologies. Thus the argument was made entirely within the terms of the ideology: women were mothers, women were oppressed, not to be oppressed meant not to be mothers or, at most, only part-time mothers."[332] Firestone, on this skeptical view, relies on a view of technology as a simple, straightforward intervention that overturns established systems of domination based on sex. For these critics, Firestone is insufficiently suspicious of the indeterminacy that inheres in the prospect of technological intervention and insufficiently attentive to the historical, social, and cultural contexts within which a given set of technologies would necessarily operate.

Firestone's position is complicated. She, for example, maligns the contemporary technoscientific apparatus: "in the hands of our current society and under the direction of current scientists… any attempted use of technology to 'free' anybody is suspect."333 She mocks "The Miracle-of-Modern-Science" narrative as "one of a whole stockpile of arguments that, no matter how often they are disproven, keep bobbing up again."334 I want to understand Firestone's approach as a kind of instrumental pragmatism that is focused—with ruthlessness and precision—on domination rooted in sex difference. Firestone's disposition toward the sciences starts with her critique of other leftist movements. Firestone traveled in various radical circles in New York City, including the Redstockings and New York Radical

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[332] Juliet C. W. Mitchell, "Procreative Mothers (Sexual Difference) and Child-Free Sisters (Gender)," *European Journal of Women's Studies* 11, no. 4 (2004): 420; discussed in Franklin, "Reprotech," 29-30.

333 Firestone, *Dialectic*, 233-34.

334 Ibid., 222.

Feminists, in the 1960s before leaving politics in the early '70s. *The Dialectic of Sex*, published when Firestone was 25, is filled with criticisms, admonitions, and suggestions aimed at Firestone's fellow "radicals." She's consistently concerned with actual outcomes and the strategies and tactics that contribute to those outcomes. For example, Firestone writes that her fellow activists often cleave too tightly to established routes of criticism: "Once again radicals have failed to think radically enough: capitalism is not the *only* enemy, redistribution of wealth and resources is not the *only* solution, attempts to control population are not *only* Third World Suppression in disguise."335 A focus on social totalities, class-based movements, and government misuse of new reproductive technology, though indispensable in certain respects, misses the technoscientific, ecological, and sexual milieux that condition problems of class and capital and, just as importantly, the avenues for resistance afforded by new reproductive technologies. By refusing to entertain technoscientific tools as potential engines for leftist aims, radicals attempt to build a more egalitarian future with their hands tied behind their backs. Left-wing movements at the time unduly fear science, Firestone argues. They confuse "the *misuse* of scientific developments" with "technology itself."336 "Radicals," she writes, "rather than breastbeating about the immorality of scientific research, could be much more effective by concentrating their *full* energies on demands for control of scientific discoveries by and for the people.

335 Ibid., 224.

336 Ibid. Firestone argues that high-minded male radicals' skeptical attitudes toward technoscience are apt to break down in the face of concrete realities, especially those that structure women's lives (224).

For, like atomic energy, fertility control, artificial reproduction, cybernation, in themselves, are liberating—*unless* they are improperly used."337 Reproductive science is on the cusp of breakthroughs with emancipatory potential, Firestone argues, but is restrained by "cultural lag and sexual bias."338 "Already we have more and better contraception than ever before in history…. Present oral contraception is at only a primitive (faulty) stage…. Artificial insemination and artificial inovulation are already a reality. Choice of sex of the fetus, test-tube fertilization… the development of an artificial placenta…. Even parthenogenesis" are all on the way.339

These advances, however, are slowed by social, cultural, and material constraints: "The money allocated for specific kinds of research [and] the kinds of research done are only incidentally in the interest of women when at all…. That women are excluded from science is directly responsible for the tabling of research on oral

337 Ibid. Emphases and punctuation *sic*.

338 Ibid, 225.

339 Ibid., 224-25. As of 2017, each of these procedures (except virgin birth) has become a reality to one degree or another. For example, the most common procedure for sex selection, preimplantation genetic diagnosis, was originally developed to detect genetic disease. Before this procedure, an embryo is fertilized and briefly incubated. Then,

> an embryologist uses a laser to cut a hole through an embryo's protective membrane and then picks out one of the eight cells. Fluorescent dyes allow the embryologist to see the chromosomes and determine whether the embryo is carrying the larger XX pair of chromosomes or the tinier XY. The remaining seven cells will go on to develop normally if the embryo is chosen and implanted in a client's uterus.

Preimplantation genetic diagnosis is banned for purposes of gender selection in the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia. It remains legal in the United States. See Jasmeet Sidhu, "How to Buy a Daughter," *Slate*, September 14, 2012; and Karen Sermon, André Van Steirteghem, and Inge Liebaers, "Preimplantation genetic diagnosis," *The Lancet* 363 (2004): 1633-41.

contraceptives for males."340 Consider as one example the halting steps taken toward the development of a full-scale artificial womb.

By the early 2000s, teams led by Helen Liu at Cornell's Center for Reproductive Medicine and Fertility had demonstrated the viability of growing mouse and human embryos in artificial environments, usually relying on some combination of endometrial tissue and artificial life support.341 A patchwork of statutory law, edicts from bioethics committees, and research decisions constrain experiments on exogenesis. New Hampshire state law, for example, maintains that "no preembryo that has been donated for use in research shall be transferred to a uterine cavity."342 From the perspective Firestone advances, the New Hampshire law and others like it (including the 14-day limitation on growing embryos in vitro) prevent new technologies from reshuffling the biological systems upon which structures of domination are based. To draw a line between the biological factors that structure social relations and technoscientific advances is to defend existing structures of domination. Firestone argues, in fact, that concern about the precarity of existing

340 Ibid., 225. Although progress has been made in this area: see Sanny S. W. Chung et al., "Oral Administration of a Retinoic Acid Receptor Antagonist Reversibly Inhibits Spermatogenesis in Mice," *Endocrinology* 152 (2011): 2492–2502; Elsimar Metzker Coutinho, "Gossypol: a contraceptive for men," *Contraception* 65 (2002): 259–63.

341 Liu has carried mouse embryos nearly to term and human embryos for about 10 days (at which point the experiment was halted for legal reasons). See Hung-Ching Liu et al., "In vitro culture and in vitro maturation of mouse preantral follicles with recombinant gonadotropins," *Fertility and Sterility* 77 (2002): 373-83; William Saletan, "The Organ Factory," *Slate*, July 29, 2005.

342 Quoted in Saletan, "Organ Factory."

power structures is the primary motivation behind resistance to reproductive technologies:

> Are people, even scientists themselves, culturally prepared for [new reproductive tech]? Decidedly not. A recent Harris poll… found a surprising number [of Americans] willing to consider the new methods. The hitch was that they would consider them only where they reinforced and furthered present values of family life and reproduction, e.g., to help a barren woman have her husband's child. Any question that could be interpreted as a furthering of "sexual revolution" alone was rejected flatly as unnatural. But note that it was not the "test tube" baby itself that was thought unnatural… but the new value system, based on the elimination of male supremacy and the family…. It is clear by now that research in the area of reproduction is itself being impeded by cultural lag and sexual bias.[343]

(The relationship between technoscience and power relations can be more insidious than mere insulation, however. Technoscientific changes in fetal viability can erode present levels of control women exercise over their reproductive systems.344 The development of a full artificial womb would push the viability of a fetus back from its present mark, 22 to 24 weeks, to zero weeks. Depending on the procedures used,

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[343] Firestone, *Dialectic*, 225.

344 One is reminded of Mies's warning to would-be Firestonians: "economic/political and military power is not in the hands of Lesbians." The paradigm that certain technological advances *could* erode present systems of domination, but that—if they occur within existing systems of exploitation and domination—they could also render marginal positions even more precarious is reproduced in contemporary debates over automation and technological unemployment. See, e.g., Andrew Targowski and Vladimír Modrák, "Is Advanced Automation Consistent with Sustainable Economic Growth in Developed World?" *Communications in Computer and Information Science* 219 (2011): 63–72; Carl Benedikt Frey and Michael A. Osborne, "The Future of Employment: How Susceptible Are Jobs to Computerisation?" *Oxford Martin Programme on the Impacts of Future Technology*, September 17, 2013; David H. Autor, "Why Are There Still So Many Jobs? The History and Future of Workplace Automation," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 29, no. 3 (2015): 3-30.

"Life begins at the moment of conception" could be experimentally substantiated. If it becomes not merely plausible, but repeatedly demonstrated, that fertilized embryos can be carried to term no matter their level of development, wombs become sites of political, ethical, and scientific contestation as never before.)

The prospect of technoscientific advances being used to constrain or rechannel reproductive pathways underscores the importance of Firestone's practical-but-radical approach to science and technology. Firestone is intensely pragmatic: she focuses on outcomes and the prospects of altering really-existing situations in creative and radical ways. Firestone's technoscientific orientation, as I have noted, is often criticized as naïve or credulous.[345] In fact, she adopts a fairly shrewd (cynical, even) position toward the sciences and technoscientific work. She notes that technological advances "could be used… to intensify the apparatus of repression and to increase established power," a prospect that, for Firestone, reinforces rather than cuts against the importance of attending to the "revolutionary significance" of new technologies and working toward the "control of scientific discoveries by and for the people."[346] Just as Dewey understands science as "an equipment, a technique of appliances and procedures,"[347] Firestone regards technoscientific advances as a set of tools in various stages of maturity that can be as useful in revolutionary hands as devastating when

345 Sarah Franklin, "Revisiting Reprotech," in *Further Adventures of* The Dialectic of Sex, ed. Mandy Merck and Stella Sanford (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010), 29-32.

346 Firestone, *Dialectic*, 225-28.

347 Dewey "Recovery," 4.

put to reactionary ends. Her stance comes out clearly in a brief discussion of computer-enabled automation and governance ("cybernation"):

> Cybernation, like birth control, can be a double-edged sword. Like artificial reproduction, to envision it in the hands of the present powers is to envision a nightmare.… the increased alienation of the masses, the intensified rule of the elite (perhaps cyberneticians), baby factories, increased government efficiency (Big Brother), and so on. In the hands of the present society there is no doubt that the machine could be used—is being used—to intensify the apparatus of repression and to increase established power…. But again, as with the population explosion, and birth control, the distinction between *misuse* of science and the value of science itself is not often kept clear. In this case, though perhaps the response may not be quite so hysterical and evasive, we still often have the same unimaginative concentration on the evils of the machine itself, rather than a recognition of its revolutionary significance.[348]

Firestone's work suggests that pragmatism and radicalism are not opposed ways of thinking. Instead, they rely on one another. Radicalism helps to keep pragmatism from slipping into a milquetoast incrementalism.[349] Radical political moves demand pragmatism because, as Firestone recognizes, the index of what is "truly radical" in given situation reflects the effects and countereffects of the course of action that is actually being undertaken, not the intellectual purism of the participants.[350] This is not to call for blind action or activity for its own sake. On the contrary, acting radically in a given situation means acting intelligently, attending to concrete encumbrances and tools.

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[348] Firestone, *Dialectic*, 226-28.

349 *Q.v.* §2.1.2.

[350] Firestone, *Dialectic*, 224-25.

The final point Firestone's work invites us to consider has to do with instrumentality.

§3.4 On instrumentality

Rationalism must itself be a feminism.

— Laboria Cuboniks

In his *Eclipse of Reason*, published in 1946, Max Horkheimer offers an influential critique of instrumentality. Horkheimer first distinguishes between reason as a faculty for use by humans (*subjektive Vernunft*, "subjective reason") and reason that inheres in the world beyond human designs (*objektive Vernunft*, "objective reason"). For Horkheimer, dangers inhere in the subjective use of reason. He is concerned that a reason never employed for its own sake, never "without reference to some kind of subjective gain or advantage," assumes an instrumental quality.[351] And "if reason itself is instrumentalized," he worries, "it takes on a kind of materiality and blindness, becomes a fetish, a magic entity that is accepted rather than intellectually experienced."[352]

Horkheimer wants to move beyond a scientistic instrumentality toward a more rigorous form of reason that does not, as he thinks pragmatism does, depart from an

351 Horkheimer, *Eclipse*, 4.

352 Ibid., 22-23.

analysis of the social order. This project is consonant with a power pragmatist view. Indeed, it seeks to open a theoretical space similar to that of power pragmatism. Horkheimer (writing near the end of World War II) prosecutes this project by way of a critique of "instrumentality." Insofar as he means an instrumentality blind to questions of power and that therefore only furthers entrenched interests, I join him in his condemnation. In fact, Horkheimer's avenue of inquiry here presages the concerns discussed in chapters one and two of this dissertation about the idea that Dewey's pragmatism is blind to the ways that power relations condition possibilities for social change. I am inclined to fix this pragmatist blind spot with thinkers like Firestone and Foucault, who have an intense interest in power relations, domination, and the social order. Horkheimer is inclined to avoid pragmatism wholesale and stay within the tradition of dialectical rationality. (It is possible that the Frankfurt school path and Dewey-Firestone-Foucault path meet somewhere in the vicinity of left accelerationist and neorationalist streams of thought.)[353]

Horkheimer accuses pragmatism, and Dewey in particular, of advancing a "subjective," and therefore instrumental, view of reason. He writes that

> pragmatism, which assigns to anything and anybody the role of an instrument—not in the name of God or objective truth, but in the name of whatever is practically achieved by it—asks scornfully what such expressions as 'truth itself,' or the good that Plato and his objectivistic successors left

[353] See, e.g., Jon Lindblom, "Late Capitalism and the Scientific Image of Man: Technology, Cognition, and Culture," in *Alleys of Your Mind: Augmented Intelligence and Its Traumas,* ed. Matteo Pasquinelli (Lüneburg, Germany: Leuphana University of Lüneburg), 107-124.

> undefined, can really mean…. The reduction of reason to a mere instrument [by pragmatism] finally affects even its character as an instrument. The anti-philosophical spirit that is inseparable from the subjective concept of reason, and that in Europe culminated in the totalitarian persecutions of intellectuals… is symptomatic of the abasement of reason.[354]

Pragmatism's interest in the usefulness of ideas allies it with a species of virulent anti-intellectualism because it understands reason as a tool for accomplishing a given set of ends rather than a freestanding practice that adequately accounts for questions of the social order and power. In a certain sense, Horkheimer's critique of the pragmatists doesn't leave him too far from Dewey's own views on reason. Recall Horkheimer's claim that "if reason itself is instrumentalized, it takes on a kind of materiality and blindness, becomes a fetish, a magic entity that is accepted rather than intellectually experienced."[355] Dewey, too, seeks to understand reason as intellectually experienced rather than as a kind of magic or abstraction disconnected from experience. Moreover, Horkheimer links formalistic reason to the practice of making nature calculable, which is in turn associated with being interested in reason insofar as it can be used to accomplish certain "subjective" ends.[356] But, as several examples later in this chapter show, it is possible to be interested in calculability and the usefulness of ideas while still attempting to undertake collective projects to improve social conditions. Firestone's own project, for example, remains unafraid of

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[354] Ibid., 53.

[355] Ibid., 23.

356 Ibid. 4-6, 41-57. J.C. Brendzen also makes this point that Horkheimer (not to mention Adorno) "assimilates" calculability to usefulness. See his *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* article on Horkheimer, http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/horkheimer/.

calculability and instrumental reason because of how they can be repurposed to destroy domination rooted in sex difference. To rethink subjective reason and applied technology in the way Firestone has is to draw nearer to the possibility of an instrumentality more suited to radical undertakings in different milieux. Instrumentality in this sense returns to the root of the word: *īnstrūmentum*: tool, provision, equipment.[357] Not an uncritical instrument for any end whatever, but instead equipment for navigation and intervention in topologies formed and deformed by fields of power.

"Once the philosophical foundation of democracy has collapsed," Horkheimer writes, "the statement that dictatorship is bad is rationally valid only for those who are not its beneficiaries, and there is no theoretical obstacle to the transformation of this statement into its opposite."[358] In one sense, this despair at where the flight of objective reason leaves you is understandable, especially in 1945. I think, however, that there is reason for hope on this score. What secures democratic practices from dissolution is a pullulating interplay of political, material, social, and historical vectors that secure (and redefine) self-determination, intelligence, democracy, and growth at varying rates. Where Horkheimer and Dewey in fact agree is that, for example,

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[357] In graduate school, I TAed for a professor who told his undergrads that doing political theory well was less like selecting correct answers from false ones and more like a musical or athletic performance. In this sense, the contemporary meaning of the word *instrumentalist* is not a bad fit for someone who tries to navigate ethical and political landscapes.

358 Horkheimer, *Eclipse*, 29. For an oddly parallel but also completely opposed argument, see Richard Rorty, "The Priority of Democracy to Philosophy," in *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 175-196.

arguing that a chemical company should not dump poison into a local river because there exist philosophical principles that render this action illegitimate is less compelling than the fact that dumping poison will destroy the town downstream and damage the community that sustained the chemical company to begin with. It'll kill kids. As William Weaver (drawing from the same Foucault interview that appears in the introduction to this dissertation) argues, "'the "best" theories do not constitute a very effective protection against disastrous political choices; certain great themes such as "humanism" can be used to any end whatever.' Only in activity, only in a praxis, only in an applied ethic do we find any measure of safety against disaster. We should concentrate on making our theory play a role in our practice rather than thinking of it as something which should naturally steer practice from above."[359] As you might remember from the introduction, Foucault continues this line of thought:

> I do not conclude from [the tenuous link between theory and political choices] that one may say just anything within the order of theory, but, on the contrary, that a demanding, prudent, 'experimental' attitude is necessary; at every moment, step by step, one must confront what one is thinking and saying with what one is doing, with what one is. I have never been too concerned about people who say: 'You are borrowing ideas from Nietzsche; well, Nietzsche was used by the Nazis, therefore…'; but, on the other hand, I have always been concerned with linking together as tightly as possible the historical and

[359] William G. Weaver, "Dewey or Foucault?: Organization and Administration as Edification and as Violence," *Organization* 4, no. 1 (1997): 31-48. The first few lines (in single quotes) come from a 1983 interview Foucault gave to Paul Rabinow, Charles Taylor, Martin Jay, Richard Rorty, and Leo Lowenthal, collected in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Random House, 1984), 373-74.

> theoretical analysis of power relations, institutions, and knowledge, to the movements, critiques, and experiences that call them into question in reality.[360]

How, then, to develop a closer link between "the historical and theoretical analysis of power relations" and to real outcomes, real struggles? Shulamith Firestone, I am arguing, offers a blueprint for just this sort of undertaking.

Consider an instrumentality not blind to currents of power (including those that run through it). Imagine communally undertaken technoscientific endeavors that supplement the idiosyncratic form the sciences exist in today, sustained and constrained as they are by particular networks of capital flows (research councils, grant-writing, the institution of tenure, the rise of contract research organizations,[361] the multibillion-dollar endowments of research institutions jutting above an ocean of student debt like icebergs in a warming sea). The sciences, as is well documented, do not stand apart from the capital flows and cultural-material hierarchies that sustain them.[362] For example, ongoing reproducibility crises in the sciences can be traced in

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[360] Foucault, *Reader*, 374. I believe this is Foucault at his most Deweyan.

[361] See Frank Davidoff *et al.*, "Sponsorship, authorship and accountability," *Canadian Medical Association Journal* 165 (2001): 786–88.

[362] Laboria Cuboniks extend this argument to reason itself, arguing that "To claim that reason or rationality is 'by nature' a patriarchal enterprise is to concede defeat. It is true that the canonical 'history of thought' is dominated by men, and it is male hands we see throttling existing institutions of science and technology. But this is precisely why feminism must be a rationalism—because of this miserable imbalance, and not despite it…. Reason, like information, wants to be free, and patriarchy cannot give it freedom. Rationalism must itself be a feminism." See Laboria Cuboniks, "Xenofeminism."

part to the fact that what can't be published in prestigious journals cannot contribute to the careers, and therefore the material security, of researchers.[363] Consider the byzantine system of U.S. patent laws that enshrine forty-fold price increases for lifesaving treatments as sound business strategy.[364] Consider the inefficiencies in the production of new treatments to begin with. The average new drug absorbs $359 million in development costs and take eight to twelve years to move from preclinical testing to patients.[365] Finally, consider the fact that the United States government, the largest funder of scientific research in any country, spends more resources on R&D for defense than on basic research.[366] "Between a third and half of the world's scientists and engineers," Daniel Deudney points out, are "at work on weapons

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[363] Brian Nosek *et al.*, "Estimating the reproducibility of psychological science," *Science* 349 (2015). When asked by a reporter why he didn't conduct more reproducibility studies, Nosek answered, "Because the grad students in my lab would never get jobs." (NPR's *Planet Money*, January 15, 2016.)

[364] Discussion around Turing Pharmaceutical's 4,000% price increase of the toxoplasmosis drug Daraprim tended to focus on the actions of the former hedge fund manager who had started the company (lionized by the *New York Times* as "brash and brilliant") and to understand his actions as aberrant to one degree or another. In fact, Turner Pharmaceutical's actions reflect a common business model among pharmaceutical firms. Daraprim itself had undergone a similar series of transactions before Turing purchased it. Daraprim's "total revenues in 2014…. were nearly 15 times what they were in 2010, even as the number of prescriptions dropped by almost a third… The drug once cost $1 a pill but the price increased sharply in 2010, after GlaxoSmithKline sold the drug to a different company, CorePharma. CorePharma, in turn, sold the drug to another company, Impax Laboratories, and Turing bought Daraprim in August." See Carolyn Johnson, "How an obscure drug's 4,000% price increase might finally spur action on soaring health-care costs," *Washington Post*, September 21, 2015, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2015/09/21/how-an-obscure-drugs-4000-price-increase-might-finally-spur-action-on-soaring-health-care-costs/.

[365] R. D. Heilman, "Drug development history, 'overview,' and what are GCPs?" *Quality Assurance* 4 (1995): 75-79; G. M. Stave and R. Joines, "An overview of the pharmaceutical industry," *Occup Medicine* 12 (1997): 1-4.

366 "Historical Trends in Federal R&D," American Association for the Advancement of Science, accessed January 24, 2016, http://www.aaas.org/page/historical-trends-federal-rd.

projects."[367] There is no ineradicable reason that this litany of inefficiency, misallocation, and exploitation must be true of scientific practice. As the following examples will suggest, scientific inquiry can be democratized much in the way Firestone imagined.

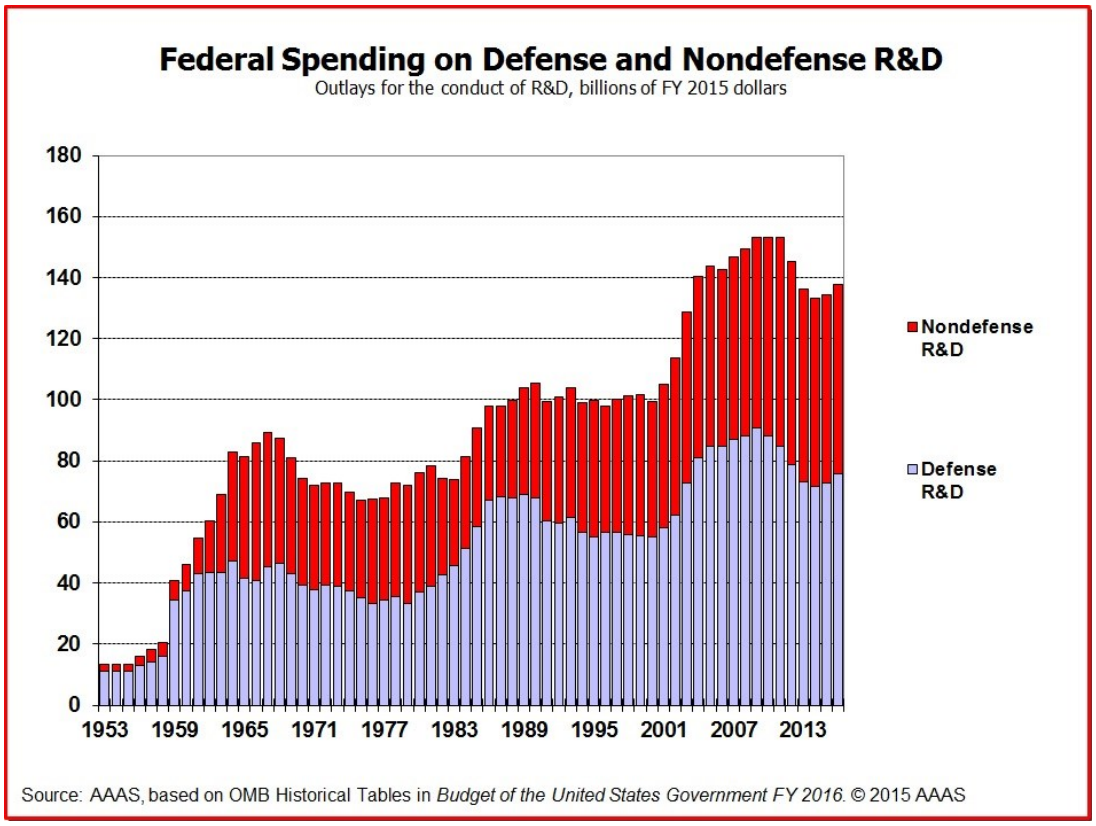

Fig. 1. "Federal Spending on Defense and Nondefense R&D," American Association for the Advancement of Science, accessed January 24, 2016, http://www.aaas.org/sites/default/files/Function_1.jpg.

Scientific inquiry requires patience, cooperation, honesty, communication, intelligent discernment, and engagement with the material world. These qualities aren't just compatible with democratic practices. They demand and are reinforced by them.

[367] Daniel Deudney, "Whole Earth Security: A Geopolitics of Peace," Worldwatch Paper 55, Worldwatch Institute (1983), 18.

Democratizing science doesn't just mean effecting a more equal distribution of the products of applied science via financial and legal changes (e.g., supplementing the pharmaceutical patent system with a prize system).[368] Democratizing the sciences also means undertaking concrete technoscientific projects in democratic-egalitarian ways. Examples of these projects are widespread. Many biopunk and -hacking projects cultivate technical know-how in service of emancipatory ends. In 2015, Ryan Hammond, a queer "tactical biologist" living in Baltimore, launched the Open Source Gendercodes project, which aims to develop "an open source platform for the production of sex hormones."[369] Hammond argues that "allow[ing] 'laypeople' to grow sex hormones would not only call into question the cultural and institutional frameworks that govern queer and trans bodies, it would also challenge the current system of pharmaceutical production. Can we imagine a communal system of pharmaceutical production in which biological materials are collectively owned?"[370] Hammond's is not merely a stylized call for collective control of the means of pharmaceutical production, but a concrete plan. He aims to develop a transgenic strain of the tobacco plant, *Nicotiana tabacum l.*, that can produce testosterone, estrogen, and other sex hormones. As long as scientific knowledge about the production of sex hormones remains immured in institutional frameworks,

[368] Joseph E. Stiglitz, "Prizes, Not Patents," *post-autistic economics review* no. 42 (2007): 48-49; see also Marlynn Wei, "Should Prizes Replace Patents? A Critique of the Medical Innovation Prize Act of 2005," *Boston University Journal of Science & Technology Law* (2007).

[369] Ryan Hammond, Open Source Gendercodes, accessed February 23, 2016, http://opensourcegendercodes.com/projects/osg/.

[370] Ibid.

Hammond argues, trans people's relationship to their own bodies remains pathologized. Using *N. tabacum*'s own metabolic pathways to produce sex hormones develops and disseminates technoscientific know-how (e.g., Hammond plans to return to the Baltimore Underground Science Space and teach others the techniques he's developed), destabilizes established scientific and medical hierarchies, and builds technoscientific practices that engender alternative means of survival in concrete, immediate terms. Molecular biologist Ellen Jorgensen argues that DIYbio projects like Hammond's, contrary to being scattershot or irresponsible, often stage more explicit ethical engagements than "proper" science. She points out that, contrary to media fears that biohacking communities would create "mutants" or manufacture biological weapons, different DIYbio communities met in 2011 and democratically formulated a common code of ethics.[371]

Engineering knowledge can be spread to great effect as well. At Barefoot College in Rajasthan, older women from non-electrified villages learn how to construct and maintain solar roof arrays, batteries, solar lamps, wiring, and other electrical projects.[372] Bunker Roy, founder of Barefoot College, echoes Firestone when he argues that democratizing science and engineering isn't merely a nice idea on its own

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[371] Available at https://diybio.org/codes/. See Ellen Jorgensen, Biohacking—you can do it, too, accessed February 23, 2016, https://www.ted.com/talks/ellen_jorgensen_biohacking_you_can_do_it_too?language=en.

[372] Bunker Roy, Anil Joshi, and Ajmer District, "Solar electrification of remote and inaccessible villages: the Barefoot approach," *Proceedings of the Asian Regional Workshop on Electricity and Development* (2005): 28-29.

terms. It's essential to the success of applied technoscientific undertakings, because "a technology just dumped on rural villages cannot be successful. The village community has to be prepared to understand, accept and own it. Village communities can run solar units on their own if they are trained to not only maintain but also to fabricate the equipment."[373] Just as Firestone argues that engagement with technoscientific research is essential for the success of political projects, Roy argues that this sort of engagement is necessary for the technical success of engineering projects and therefore in how these successes augment the capabilities of those engaged in them. He notes that "the collective confidence the communities have shown in taking responsibility to decide their needs for themselves and ultimately own the project" is manifest in "the involvement of rural women in the dissemination of this sophisticated technology. For the first time solar technology has been demystified and… women have demonstrated how effectively they could manage and control the technology to improve their quality of life…. For the first time [these] women have demonstrated their competence and confidence to handle technology at the village level and provide service in their own community…. The innovation is in involving the whole community in selecting semi-literate women as engineers to provide a vital technical service in non-traditional areas."[374]

[373] Roy, "Solar electrification," 28-29.

[374] Ibid., 29.

Fig. 1. Afghan and Indian women work on solar lamps in Rajasthan. From Bunker Roy, "Learning from a barefoot movement," July 2011, https://www.ted.com/talks/bunker_roy?language=en.

Humans also mobilize technoscientific knowledge as a means of self-defense. Consider the way that the residents of Flint, Michigan, were forced to "become citizen scientists" in response to the presence of lead in the town's drinking water.[375] Marc Edwards, a civil engineer involved in testing Flint's water, points out that "Half the water industry does not understand what these people learned on their own to protect their children."[376] Anna Barry-Jester describes how, when residents were told about the levels of lead in their water,

> although some expressed shock and concern over how they would pay for bottled water or a filter… many expressed relief at having the concerns they'd been expressing for months validated. "One woman said to us, 'You mean that's the results for my tap? That's empowering.' She actually used the word

[375] Anna Maria Barry-Jester, "What Went Wrong in Flint," *FiveThirtyEight*, January 26, 2016, http://fivethirtyeight.com/features/what-went-wrong-in-flint-water-crisis-michigan/.

[376] Quoted in Barry-Jester, "Flint."

'empowering.'"… How could finding poison in your water be empowering?… When you've spent nearly a year being told by public officials that your own experience isn't what you think it is, even grave news can be rewarding. Dozens of Flint's residents who had been gathering data and information for nearly a year knew something wasn't right. While state and federal agencies almost obsessively focused on proving that they were meeting federal regulations, rather than taking a deeper look at whether Flint's drinking water was safe, residents begged them to pay attention to the valuable data they'd collected through their bodies and research.[377]

[377] Ibid.

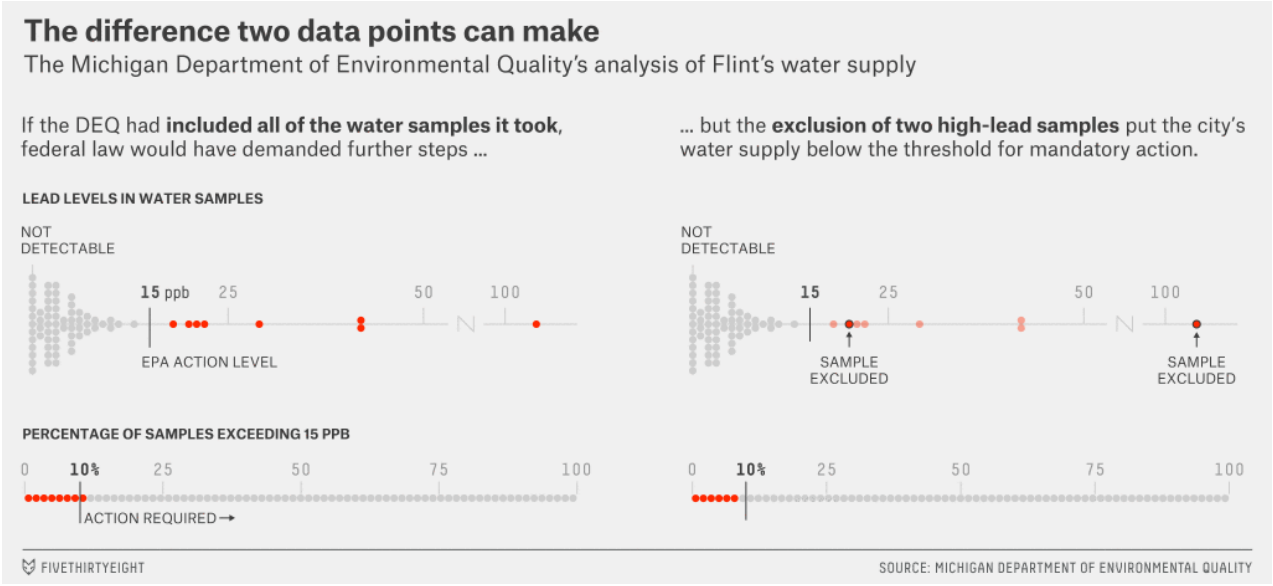

Fig. 3. Flint's water, viewed two different ways. Visualization by Ritchie King and Ella Koeze, "What Went Wrong in Flint," FiveThirtyEight, January 26, 2016, http://fivethirtyeight.com/features/what-went-wrong-in-flint-water-crisis-michigan/.

For the residents of Flint, lead microgram-per-deciliter (μg/dL) measurements offered lifesaving purchase in a political fight. It is not clear where Flint citizens' mastery of water-quality metrics fits in the hierarchies of instrumentality and varieties of reason. Does their measurement of lead μg/dL in their drinking water and blood reflect mere calculability, the insidious creep of scientific rationality, human hubris, and so on? Or is it more likely that, by mastering water quality measurements and blood tests, the residents of Flint strategically repurposed their own edge of a technoscientific apparatus related to water and blood contamination in order to claim for themselves and their children a more survivable future?

Open Source Gendercodes, biohacking, Barefoot College, Flint's citizen-scientists: these are but a few of the innumerable projects that democratically mobilize

technoscientific tools.[378] As I will argue in chapter four, projects focused on developing replacement technologies for existing infrastructure services (e.g., the way you get potable water, calories, heat, shelter, internet access, and so on) have the potential to reshape what is possible in the domain of radical political projects. There is no reason that democratizing science means lowering standards or sacrificing rigor. Recall that women were resisted (and still are)[379] in the sciences for fear they'd reduce the rigor of serious research. The history of science went another way, however: Rosalind Franklin photographed DNA, Chien-Shiung Wu overturned the law of conservation of parity, Jocelyn Bell Burnell discovered pulsars, Françoise Barré-Sinoussi helped to discover HIV.

The current set of institutional practices recognized as science remain warped by the capital flows that support them. The contemporary scientific research archipelago is exemplary at some things and mind-bogglingly bad at others. Efforts to alter the legal and financial structures that insulate and constrain funded science today are necessary, but must be accompanied by democratic attempts to seize and redeploy technoscientific know-how.

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[378] Rapid cost decreases of techniques like DNA sequencing, materials like polyethylene plastics, and hardware like integrated circuits have made projects like these increasingly feasible. For modeling of these cost decreases, see J. Doyne Farmer and Francois Langford, "How predictable is technological progress?" *Research Policy* 45, no. 3 (2016): 647–665.

[379] Corinne A. Moss-Racusin *et al.*, "Science faculty's subtle gender bias favors male students," *PNAS* 109, no. 41 (2012): 16474–16479.

§3.5 Pragmatic-radical technoscience

Consider again Eric MacGilvray's argument that "science for the pragmatist is not, as the caricature has it, a worldview that renders traditional ethical discourse obsolete, nor is it simply a method that can be applied indiscriminately to all kinds of social problems. Pragmatism treats scientific inquiry instead as an enormously successful set of practices that have profoundly reshaped the way… we interact with our environment and aims to assess the implications of this success for our understanding of [our] capacities and purposes."[380] It is not necessary to choose between, on one hand, science as a kind of bald naturalism, reductive physicalism, positivist calculability or, on the other hand, as a frictionless and arbitrary practice that offers no purchase on the world. Firestone exemplifies the power pragmatist approach to science insofar as she (i) pairs a Deweyan emphasis on science as concrete techniques and appliances for inquiry with an acute sensitivity to domination, and, following from this, (ii) argues that technoscience and domination are intimately linked at many joints, and that these linkages remind us of the fact that (i) can alter the conditions that sustain (ii). *The Dialectic of Sex* offers a roadmap for using and conceptualizing technoscience: recognize the inextricability of material and biological forces from the social field, understand science as layered procedures for enacting, recognizing, manipulating, and remaking material forces, and mobilize scientific procedures for

380 MacGilvary, "Five Myths," 501.

disrupting the material and biological conditions and feedback loops that sustain systems of domination.

This, I argue, is Firestone's lasting contribution: a pragmatic-radical approach to technoscience that directs theoretical practice toward efforts to devise a means for the destruction of systems of domination, bequeathed to those wish to build a more survivable world not in fantastic isolation from the present, but within it. If anyone has carried forward Foucault's hope for "a demanding, prudent, 'experimental' attitude [that] links together as tightly as possible the historical and theoretical analysis of power relations, institutions, and knowledge, to the movements, critiques, and experiences that call them into question in reality"[381] and Dewey's injunction to "imagine a future in which is the projection of the desirable in the present, and to invent the instrumentalities of its realization,"[382] it is Firestone.

[381] Foucault, *Reader*, 374.

[382] Dewey, "Recovery of Philosophy," 69.

Chapter four

§4.1 Upstream

In this chapter I'd like to introduce a minor tradition on the periphery of contemporary political thought called stacktivism and to argue that one way of putting the combination of Dewey and Foucault called power pragmatism to work involves a stacktivist outlook. I discuss how the stacktivist movement helps focus critical energy on the way infrastructure conditions political possibilities. I also argue that building non-metaphorical means of life support is an essential project for radical politics.

§4.2 Stacktivism

> When you turn on the heat in winter, you're turning on this service that's directly connected to the structure of global capitalism. And then the enormous structure of global capitalism is maintained largely by the force of the American government, and to some degree the Europeans and the Chinese, and then their intelligence services protect that status quo from any kind of disruption. It's the closing of the loop between the provision of critical infrastructure and the need for defense and security service that gets in your lives that's the core tension of why

> we can't make progress against these forces. As long as we're dependent on a system of global oppression to give us cheap natural resources, and to maintain the wealth disparity between us and the poor of the world, those systems of oppression serve our basic needs, and as a result we cannot get free of them… The only way of getting out of this is to get into a position where we're no longer dependent… on the standing means of political oppression for our basic survival needs.
>
> – Vinay Gupta

It's London, it's 1854, it stinks. The houses of Soho sit on top of cesspools. When these cesspools fill up, the city dumps its sewage into the Thames. In late August, the inhabitants of Soho begin to die. That they are dying of cholera is unmistakable:

> Few diseases have a clinical presentation as striking as that of cholera. Massive watery diarrhoea, up to 1 L per hour, can lead to hypotensive shock and death within hours of the first symptom…. Death rates in untreated patients with severe cholera can exceed 70%.... The characteristic rice-water stool of cholera develops with continued purging; this term refers to the similarity of the stool to water in which rice has been washed. Vomiting is a common feature, particularly early in illness.
>
> Dehydration and electrolyte abnormalities are the most important complications of cholera. Patients can be lethargic, and might have sunken eyes, dry mouth, cold clammy skin, decreased skin turgor, or wrinkled hands and feet. Kussmaul breathing [a kind of labored hyperventilation] can occur because of acidosis from stool bicarbonate losses and lactic acidosis associated with poor perfusion. The peripheral pulse is rapid and thready, and can become difficult to palpate as blood pressure drops; urine output decreases with time. Muscle cramping and weakness due to electrolyte losses and ion

> shifts (particularly potassium and calcium) are common. In children, depletion of glycogen stores and inadequate gluconeogenesis can lead to severe hypoglycaemia, shown by altered consciousness, seizures, or even coma.[383]

One hundred seventy-two die of cholera in 72 hours. By the 1850s, London's graveyards are overflowing. The dead are stacked beneath churches, dumped into sewers. No one has any illusions about what these bodies mean. The cholera epidemic of 1848-49, which killed between 54,000 and 62,000 Londoners (from a population of ~2.9 million), hangs over the city like a shroud.

Into the breach steps a physician named John Snow. Through painstaking interviews, water sampling, and legwork, Snow constructs a "ghost map" of the cholera deaths in Soho.

[383] Jason B. Harris et al., "Cholera," *Lancet* 379 (2012): 2466–76.

Fig. 4. John Snow's "ghost map." Note the central X, denoting the contaminated Broad Street pump, surrounded by death-dots.

Gradually, Snow becomes more convinced that cholera did not come from "bad air," as the miasmists of his day argued. Instead, he begins to suspect that London's water

is the primary conduit for the disease. Snow, conducting days of interviews and tracking down drinking water sources, identifies one public water pump, on Broad Street, as the center of the outbreak. "Snow had built a convincing statistical case against the pump," Steven Johnson writes. "Of the eighty-three deaths recorded [by one source], seventy-three were in houses that were closer to the Broad Street pump than to any other public water source. Of those seventy-three, Snow had learned, sixty-one were habitual drinkers of the Broad Street water. Only six of the dead were definitively not Broad Street drinkers…. The ten cases that fell outside the… Broad Street pump were equally telling: eight appeared to have a connection Broad Street. Snow had established new causal chains back to the pump water."[384] Snow presented his case to the Board of Governors and Directors of St. James Parish, who—though skeptical—ordered the Broad Street pump handle to be removed. The epidemic subsided.

By examining the details of how a person in Soho got drinking water every morning, Snow was able to understand how minor but deeply-set infrastructural features—in this case, a porous barrier between a private cesspool and the Broad Street pump well—altered the historical, political, and social trajectories of London.[385] Snow engaged in an early form of stacktivist analysis. By removing the pump handle from the Broad Street well, Snow effected an informed but experimental intervention into

[384] Steven Johnson, *The Ghost Map* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2006), 153.

[385] Ibid., 179.

the way critical services are delivered. His crucial move, so obvious in hindsight it is easy to underestimate, was to trace a thread of causation from a one-meter iron pump handle across interlocking layers of material, technical, social, and biological systems to the *V. cholerae* bacteria in the small intestines of Londoners. For these reasons, Snow is a foundational figure for the way of focusing political energies called "stacktivism."

The term stacktivism,[386] coined by the writer Jay Springett, first surfaced in political, artistic, and cypherpunk circles in the United Kingdom in the early 2010s. Stacktivists attend to the infrastructural supports that make possible certain political, social, and material realities. A "stack" just denotes the layered pile of technologies a person's lifestyle is built on. When Benjamin Bratton, for example, writes about "The Stack," he describes the levels of technology that make global computing possible as a vertically-arranged, "modular, interdependent… multilayered structure" that includes

[386] Stacktivism is not an institutionalized field of thought. There is no *Journal of Stacktivism Studies*. (If you're interested, the *International Journal of Critical Infrastructures*, founded in 2004, provides technical grist for the infrastructure studies mill, albeit without stacktivism's political inflection. There was also some attempt to establish an *Open Journal of Critical Infrastructure Studies* in 2013, but I can't find evidence that this took off.) Established academics like Keller Easterling, Ash Amin, and Benjamin Bratton conduct work that embraces a critical approach to infrastructure (for example, Amin argues that "Urban flows of staples such as information, electricity, sanitation, water, housing, and education will remain central arbiters of the capacity… to face the future. The difference between abjection and bearable survival will be regulated—as is already the case for more than a billion residents living on the breadline—by whether the poor can have access to the staples of life as public goods." See "Surviving the Turbulent Future," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 31 [2013]: 153), but they do not use the term stacktivism.

(As usual, I set no special status or claim of ownership over any one term—I'm just as happy to discuss "critical approaches to critical services," "politicoinfrastructurism," "life-support braids," or any other plausible-sounding handle as I am stacktivism.)

"infrastructure at the continental scale, pervasive computing at the urban scale, and ambient interfaces at the perceptual scale."[387]

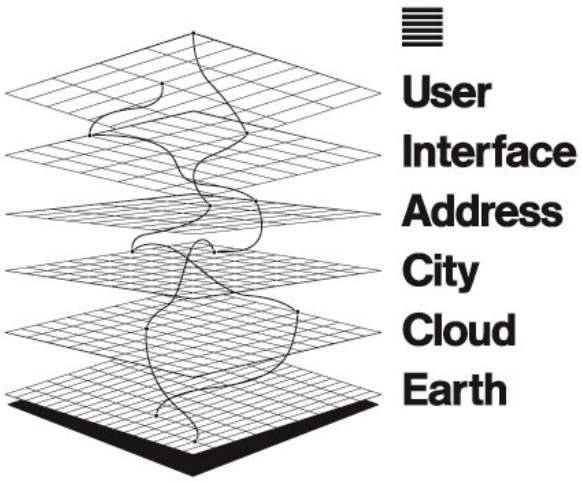

Fig. 5. "Diagram by Metahaven of the six layers of The Stack." See Benjamin Bratton, *The Stack* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2015). This minimalist visualization, like Bratton's book, schematizes the stack that supports cloud computing. There are other stacks, of course, like those that make possible the delivery of fluoridated water in cities or those that make it possible to heat buildings in winter, and these stacks interleave like decks of cards partially shuffled into one another.

The trick is to begin thinking of how critical services like food, water, energy, shelter, medical care, and communication emerge from their own stacks, to map how the components of these stacks are tied together vertically (how much of Chile's Salar de Atacama salt flats reside inside your house in the form of lithium-ion batteries?), to map how technology stacks are horizontally interleaved with one another (delivering

[387] Benjamin Bratton, *The Stack* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2015), 3-5.

heat and desalinating water may both rely on the same power lines), what the political components of these stacks are, and how they can be reformulated.

For example: the power button on your computer in Baltimore is directly linked to macrophage activity in the lungs of miners in southwestern Pennsylvania. If you live in Maryland, about 44% of your electricity comes from burning coal to produce steam to spin turbines. Much of the coal that feeds the city of Baltimore is mined in Greene County, Pennsylvania, at the Bailey Mine Complex, barged to Anne Arundel County, and burned at the Brandon Shores Generating Station to produce steam to produce electricity.[388] Electrons run from Brandon Shores through aluminum conductor steel-reinforced cables into your food processor or the worn-out light fixture over your bathroom mirror.

[388] U.S. Energy Information Administration, form EIA923, 2015ER, July 23, 2016, http://www.eia.gov/electricity/data/eia923/.

Fig. 6. Coal storage silos at the Bailey Mine Complex in Greene County, PA. Katelyn Ferral and David Conti, "Consol Energy files for IPO of coal spin-off," TribLive, April 1, 2015, **http://triblive.com/business/headlines/8089530-74/coal-consol-operate?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+alltribstories+%28TribLIVE+News%29**.

Thinking about the stack of technologies that makes your lifestyle possible lends an enabling literalism to political and ethical questions. It means redescribing a given situation in terms of the components that sustain the survival and wellbeing of those in the situation. A lumbering abstraction like "homelessness" dissolves into concrete questions: "How many square meters of clean horizontal surfaces that can be used for sleeping do we have in this neighborhood? Are these horizontal surfaces accessible? Can they be cooled and heated? Can they be made safe for women, queer, trans people?"[389]

[389] See Shaun Donovan, "Ending Homelessness in Our Time: Why Smart Government Is Key," *Public Manager* 40 (2011): 23-27; James Surowiecki, "Home Free?" *The New Yorker*, September 22,

Most human deaths fall into six categories: too hot, too cold, hunger, thirst, illness, or injury.[390] Groups of humans have developed different life-support systems for delaying the time at which they will die from one of these causes. This is true at every scale, from a single human striking flint in the woods to workers clocking in at the Brandon Shores Generating Station to the shackle hoist operator at a slaughterhouse. Stacktivists map the operational scales of different life support systems with simple critical infrastructure maps, or SCIMs, like this one:

2014; Tom Baker and Joshua Evans, "'Housing First' and the Changing Terrains of Homeless Governance," *Geography Compass* 10 (2016): 28.

[390] Vinay Gupta, "Dealing in Security: understanding vital services and how they keep you safe," v3.2, July 9, 2010, http://resiliencemaps.org/files/Dealing_in_Security.July2010.en.pdf.

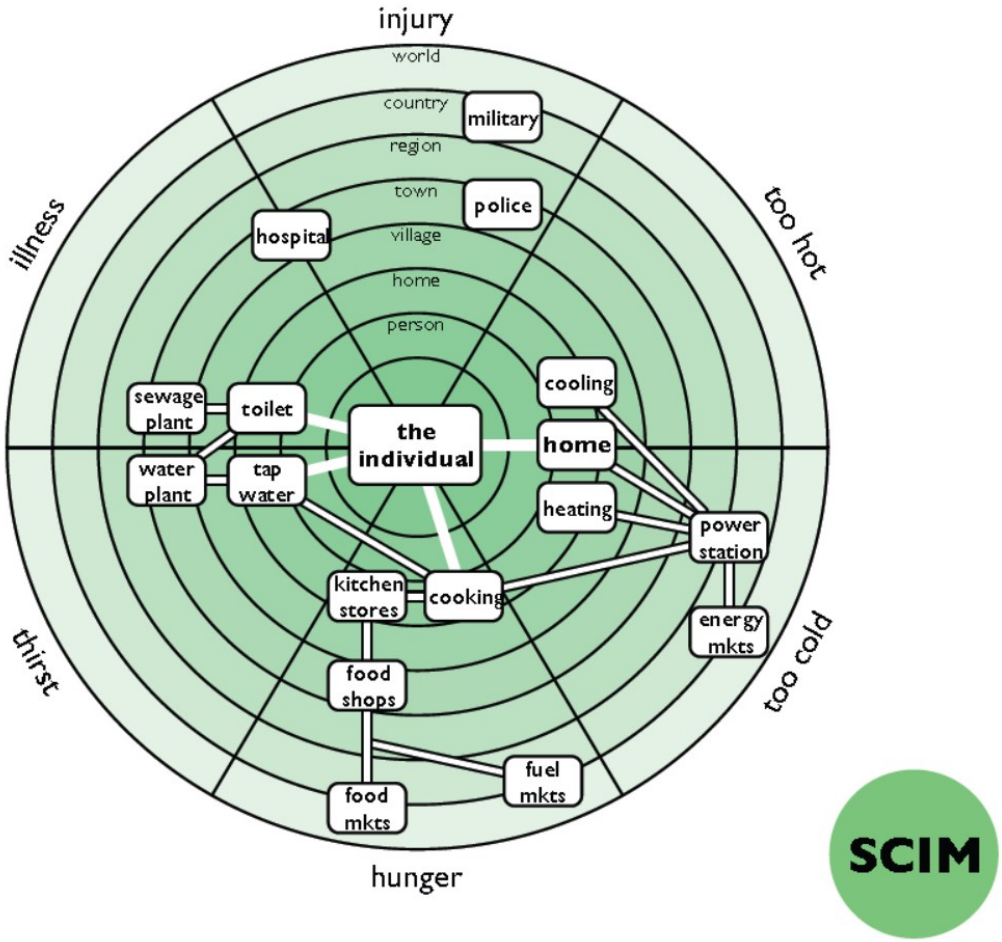

Fig. 7. A simple critical infrastructure map. This SCIM "shows how a typical western individual is protected from the *six ways to die* by the *layers of infrastructure*." See Gupta, "Dealing in Security." Emphases Gupta.

As Vinay Gupta argues, "the way that we provide basic life support" has changed. "If you think about the old world, the farms and the villages that our ancestors all came from—in that world your water came from a well, and if your well got contaminated you got sick and that was pretty much the end of the story. Where we are now today, your water comes from enormous reservoirs and then it's processed in factories and tested for quality and then it comes out your tap. But all of that system is still solving

the same problem you're solving with a well…. We [have] started to build larger-scale infrastructure to keep us alive."[391] To be sure, these life-support systems are the product of political struggles informed by values about who is entitled to life and who is not. "One of the things the Luddites understood," as Jay Springett argues, "was that certain technologies internalize certain ideologies."[392] But the stacks of interlocking technologies that make your life possible also represent the terrain of current and future political struggles, and their making and unmaking of human life is itself a site of justice and injustice worth contesting politically. Keller Easterling extends and complicates Springett's point that technologies internalize ideologies when she writes that "infrastructure has often been groomed as either an instrument of militarism, liberalism, or universal rationalization.… [but] the less dramatic or upstaged histories—regarding the growth of international organizations, the division of the radio spectrum, or the creation of the satellite, fiber-optic, and mobile telephony networks" demand attention as well. In fact, they demand *more* attention: "The things that make infrastructure space powerful—its multipliers (e.g., zones, cell phones, spatial products), its irrational fictions, or its undeclared but consequential activities—are perhaps the very things" that constitute the most fecund grounds for political struggle.[393] Easterling urges a technically-informed, infrastructurally-sensitive,

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[391] Transcribed from Vinay Gupta, "One Network One World," presentation at Observe Hack Make, September 2, 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9CTCrWNYGTE.

[392] Jay Springett, "Seeing the Stack," *The Thought Menu*, April 2, 2015, http://opentranscripts.org/transcript/seeing-stack/.

[393] Keller Easterling, *Extrastatecraft* (New York: Verso, 2014), 21-23.

"less self-congratulatory, less automatically oppositional, but potentially effective and sneakier set of techniques [for political struggle]. Techniques like gifts, pandas, exaggerated compliance, gossip, rumors, remote controls, entrepreneurialism…. This extended repertoire of form-making that's both more elusive and powerful: multipliers, remotes, topologies, or subtraction, among others, techniques of active form, become techniques for this political art." Easterling argues that these subtler techniques make sense when you realize that "power is already present in these [political, infrastructural, economic] networks. It's not necessarily an obstacle, but rather a means to amplify or leverage or exploit…. A sneakier David wouldn't bother to kill Goliath, but use Goliath to do the work…. Not tense binaries of resistance, but release into a new territory." "Righteousness," she argues,

> is often fooled by the sneaky way that the world works…. And what one finds is not an epic binary tale of enemies and innocents, but that a little epidemic of rumor or duplicity finally captures the world's attention…. Dissent's often left shaking its fist at an effigy, or exhausting itself in escalating the very tensions that it hoped to diffuse…. Insisting on 'proper' forms of political resistance forecloses on the very dissensus that it wishes to instigate. So just as many of the most powerful regimes use proxies and doubles and this kind of extrastatecraft, I'd like to imagine an unwitting, maybe even unwelcome, auxiliary or cohort that helps the more righteous activists with an unorthodox form of activism. And don't mistake this for equivocation or collusion. And it's not a position for the pure or faint of heart, since it involves swimming in some of the same waters with all of the other shills and butlers and confidence men.[394]

[394] Transcribed from a lecture given by Easterling on the San Francisco campus of the California College of the Arts, November, 2012, accessed February 26, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eBvo9Ch92r8. Romand Coles echoes Easterling's point about not shielding oneself from action that feels dirty or compromised when he argues that coöptation

The systems that allow you to maintain the blood sugar and hydration levels that allow you to participate in a die-in or write a chapter for an edited volume are as constitutive of political action as the ideational and cultural drivers and stakes of those actions. One thinks of the story Michael Hardt relates in *Examined Life*:

> For my generation in the mid-eighties, when I was in my twenties, just getting involved with politics in a serious way, it seemed like the only way to—the only outlet for revolutionary desire was to go to Central American and somehow participate in or at least observe their revolutions. So a lot of people went to Nicaragua. I, with my friends, was mostly interested in El Salvador.
>
> The defining moment came for me at a meeting in El Salvador with the group of students at the University of El Salvador…. At a certain point, a friend there said, "Look, we're really grateful for these North American comrades who come to help, but what would really be best for us is if you all would go home and make revolution in the U.S. That would really be better than trying to come help us here."
>
> And it was true of course. I don't think any of these North Americans were particularly helpful in Nicaragua and El Salvador, et cetera. And but I said at that point, "You know, Reagan's in the Whitehouse, I have no idea what it would mean to make revolution in the U.S. I just don't have any…"
>
> And he said, "Look, don't you have mountains in the U.S.?"

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ought to run both ways: "[The Left] ha[s] too often avoided asking how we might create interfaces between radical democratic dynamics and neoliberal dynamics in ways that enable us to co-opt some of the latter in ways that enhance the former in potentially transformative ways. Though we have often and rightly criticized the politics of capitalist co-optation, we have failed to ask whether and how we might generate a politics of radically democratic co-optation that moves in a different direction" Is it surprising that a group that shamelessly coöpts and bends to its ends every vocabulary and tactic it can lay hands on might make rapid progress against a group animated by fears of "being coöpted," that winces at the implications of its own strategies, that makes profitable sport of cannibalizing its own ideas? See Coles, *Visionary Pragmatism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 118.

> And I said, "Yeah, we have mountains."
>
> He says, "It's easy. You go to the mountains, you start an armed cell, you make revolution."
>
> And I thought, "Oh shit."
>
> You know? It just didn't correspond to my reality. Those notions of constructing the armed cell, especially constructing the armed cell in the mountains, and then sabotaging things. It didn't, it didn't make any sense at all. We really had no idea how to do it. Not just we didn't know practically, like we didn't know which rifles to take up to the mountains…. The whole idea of what it involved was lacking.[395]

No one will say forming an armed cell in the mountains is not the truly radical move. From where I am sitting in Baltimore, I could drive to West Virginia, purchase AR-15s, M107s, and so forth, and form an armed cell in the Blue Ridge Mountains outside of Washington, D.C. I'd have to get someone to cover my classes, but I could recruit some friends and do it tomorrow. Yet we know what would happen: even if we weren't detained or killed by Virginia State Police tactical response units, we'd be at risk of starvation or dying of exposure. There'd be no way to get a cell signal, medical supplies, or potable water. It is, as Gupta argues, this "closing of the loop between the provision of critical infrastructure and the need for defense and security service [that is] the core tension of why we can't make progress against these forces." The same goes, of course, for activism and left-political work that does not involve forming armed cells. Few things better define the position of the contemporary left

[395] Transcribed from an interview in *Examined Life*, Astra Taylor (New York City: Zeitgeist Films, 2008).

activist and thinker than being calorically dependent on far-reaching, militarily-defended structures of global capitalism while at the same time undertaking the conceptual labor of dismantling those structures on cultural and intellectual terrain. The first step is to move beyond simple hypocrisy framing[396] and to recognize, with stacktivism, the omnipresence of this question and the recognition that the infrastructural components of this problem are not accounted for, that sophisticated cultural and textual criticism have been leveraged against a problem that is at root more about avoiding cholera outbreaks than it is (or, at least, before it is) about fine-tuning the critique of the critique of the critique of late capital.[397] "The only way of getting out of" the feedback loop wherein leftists agitate against global capitalism while being within the closed loop of capitalism as the delivery mechanism for critical services, Gupta argues, "is to get into a position where we're no longer dependent…

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[396] E.g., You claim to want to dismantle capitalism but you buy food at a grocery store! Bang! This stream of critique is largely indistinguishable from children pretending to shoot each other on playgrounds, complete with mock swaying and fainting and indeterminacy over what constitutes being shot and how long you have to stay dead as a gesture of recognition of having lost.

[397] See also Joy James' questions about the relationship between black intellectuals and nonelite black activism: "Speech acts hardly function as a form of political… radicalism when severed from the struggles of nonelite communities. To explore this 'activism's' relationship to political organizing, we must ask and answer a number of questions. How do we distinguish between the experiential acts in political organizing that create the subject matter for the radical rhetoritician and the literature or speech that is commodified as black revolutionary performance. How does mere… writing about radicalism within a corporate institution qualify one as a 'radical'? How does the literary or academic radicalism of elites supersede or mitigate the radical acts of nonelites that create the subject matter for their work?... Redefining radical activism as the literary production of nonactivists is apt to be a disingenuous political act. If intellectuals need only to declare themselves as militant rather than be recognized by or organize with activists, then politics as a phenomenon is supplanted by the individualism of the political egoist." See Joy James, *Transcending the Talented Tenth* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 186-88.

on the standing means of political oppression for our basic survival needs."[398] How is this possible?

Questions about how the means of survival[399] are distributed apply in Halicarnassus in 350 BCE, in Alaska in 1741, in London in 1854, in Flint in 2014. The answers illuminate from beneath how these societies are organized. Which lives matter and which do not? What type of labor is remunerated, and why? Does anyone, in actual fact, think of the children? Asking about the means of not dying derives a kind of universalizability from the facts that (i) everyone *can* die, (ii) most people die if their means of survival go away, (iii) the means of survival for those that have access to them are contingent upon really-existing political and economic systems, (iv) the means of survival for those who do *not* have regular access to them are also provisioned based on really-existing political and economic systems, which is to say that (v) most people's actual survival is linked to the organization of the political and

[398] Gupta, "One Network."

[399] I don't mean to fixate on "bare survival" here, nor to imply that questions of flourishing do not matter. However, I do think there is a basic, Maslowish order of operations at play here in which survival figures centrally in part because it allows one to do the other things like flourish. The reverse is not true. My focus on survival is also motivated by the fact that about one third of the ~60 million human deaths per year are deaths from poverty, and so an interest in how to avoid dying is not a kind of "what-if" apocalypse fetishism, but of practical interest to most of the human beings on planet Earth. This Gupta point is worth repeating: "Collapse," for the citizens of rich countries, means "living in the same conditions as the people who grow your coffee." See Gupta, "Time to Stop Pretending," presentation given at The Dark Mountain Festival, 2009, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EkQCy-UrLYw.

economic systems within which they live.[400] These points, I think, are obvious, but also all the more important for their obviousness.

Trying to figure out how not to die—on behalf of yourself and others—grows actionable lines of inquiry and opens onto a braided stream of possible workarounds, all while remaining sensitive to factors like relative urgency and power differentials.[401] The way basic life-support systems are organized is—no less than culture, politics, religion, or geography—a fundamental and differentiating feature of different societies. Gupta, speaking at The Dark Mountain festival (a conference centering on, among other concerns, the idea of civilizational collapse) points out that "collapse," for his audience, will mean not a comic-book apocalypse, but rather "living in the same conditions as the people who grow your coffee."[402] Thinking about means of survival is not just a prudent thing to do in the case of coastal inundation from rising sea levels, the breakdown of the global ocean conveyor belt, widespread crop failure, ocean acidification, and so on. Thinking about actual means of survival is to invite

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[400] Note that those in position (iii) and those in position (iv) may have opposed interests. A perfectly flat distribution of global GDP leaves everyone on Earth with about $11,000 per person per year. This is something of a demotion for those in rich countries (average per capita GDP in the United States is about $53,000), but a life-altering improvement for "the people in the world [who] are still in the process of solving the basic problems of how they stay alive… [those] trying to figure out how not to be too hot, too cold, hungry, thirsty, ill, or get injured," many of whom live on <$500 per person per year. See Gupta, "Time."

[401] See Jay Springett, "Stacktivism and the Means Not to Die From," talk delivered at the New Luddism panel at Immaterial Labour Isn't Working, April 21, 2013, available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xXMQYha_8Dk.

[402] Gupta, "Time."

into political theory the set of questions that animate the lives of a plurality of the human beings on planet Earth.

§4.2.1 Exit wounds

> We'll have to know how to fight, how to pick locks, how to set fractures and deal with throat infections; how to build a pirate radio transmitter; how to set up street cafes; how to aim straight; how to gather together scattered knowledge and set up wartime agronomics; understand plankton biology; soil composition; study the way plants interact and thus rediscover lost intuitions; get to know possible uses for and connections with our immediate surroundings, and the limits we can't go beyond without exhausting them; and we have to start to do all that today.
>
> – The Invisible Committee, *The Coming Insurrection*

The central problem with the prospect of rapid radical political and cultural transformation is that if you disassemble the stacks of interlocking technics that support human life, many people will die because you've removed the way they get calories, potable water, medical treatment, and heat. The question, then, is how to

dismantle existing systems of oppression without also dismantling the life-support systems with which they're cogrown.

A sensible plan for radical transformation, therefore, will start with a plan for taking care of basic human needs: an alternative technology stack for keeping human beings alive so that they don't die when the standard systems of feeding and caring for them fail or are removed. Gupta argues that "you don't [convert to a new life-support stack] by pulling the old one down. You [convert] by building a new one, prototyping it, bootstrapping it from the resources of the old, proving that it works, and then pulling the population across."[403] As Bratton points out, stacks are "intrinsically modular," so each is "also a platform, and an interface even, for the redesign and replacement of the Stack-we-have with a Stack-we-want."[404] To think about radical transformation—up to and including revolution—without thinking about infrastructure is to neglect that engineering and politics are embedded in each other. Because any plan for political transformation must start with some kind of life-support plan, it makes sense to start working on these types of plans and to bring this work explicitly into the political-theory fold. Working to diagram and assemble alternative life-support stacks has the potential to convert cycles of radical action from self-defeating to self-reinforcing. As activists and thinkers are increasingly able

[403] Gupta, "One Network."

[404] Benjamin Bratton, *The Stack*, xviii. "Or perhaps," he cautions, "with the Stack-we-want-the-least."

to live with partial independence from[405] existing stacks, and to not get enmeshed in questions about who's going to call in sick to work or argue with Comcast this week, they are able to think, agitate, and act in a more engaged manner, which opens space for further political-material-technical moves that strengthen alternative stacks, which engenders further agitation and thought, which restarts the cycle. For example, Bitcoin's role as a functional component of an alternative financial stack (i) demonstrates the technical viability of blockchain-based experiments to create alternative stacks for education, personal identification, energy markets, housing, carbon emission tracking, and so on, and (ii) pulls developers, users, and billions of dollars in wealth from existing financial stacks into alternative ones, which creates the material, technical, and social grist for further developments. To be sure, purchasing baby formula or pizza with a blockchain currency is not itself a shatteringly radical move, especially if the supply chains for what you have bought can still be traced through to structures of degradation, exploitation, and accumulation. This is why building alternative stacks for the production and transport of energy, food, heat, and information that interleave with alternative financial structures like blockchain currencies remains a critical and self-reinforcing task.[406]

Developing alternative life-support stacks opens up ways of rethinking radical separatism. The alternative and libertarian right have long hosted "preppers," who

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[405] (As I'll argue, partial independence from does not always mean physically outside of.)

[406] For further work along these lines, see Terranova, "Red Stack Attack!" 381-99.

practice a kind of consumerist self-sufficiency intended to guard against societal collapse. "Prepping" usually consists of buying canned goods, jugs of water, weapons, ammunition, first aid kits, flashlights, and so on, storing them on clip shelving in a cabin or vacation home, and waiting. Stacktivism opens the possibility of combining the prepper mindset with the point that collapse is already here, or arriving soon, for much of the world. It is striking how closely "prepper" websites, often dismissed as fantastic, engage with practical questions about the conditions for human survival: "4 Ways To Preserve Food In A Solar Oven," "My Off-Grid Water Solution," "How to Make a Gas Cache," "The Complete Guide to Foraging Wild Greens in North America."[407] A left prepperism could mean carving out spaces of survival[408] not only

[407] Prepper Website – Preparedness, Survival & Alternative News, Todd Sepulveda, accessed 9/20/16, http://www.prepperwebsite.com.

[408] Preppers, generally speaking, love military hardware. Do left-preppers? It depends what sort of threat is most salient, but it's probable that left preppers would sit closer to antifascists and others who argue for well-armed people's militias than to liberals who favor strong gun control. Well-armed left militias may offer a form of resistance against certain kinds of political violence,* but increasing the availability of firearms increases the risk of mass shootings, accidental deaths, and suicides. See, e.g., M. Miller, D. Azrael, D. Hemenway, "Firearms and violence death in the United States," in *Reducing Gun Violence in America*, ed. D.W. Webster and J.S. Vernick (Baltimore MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013).

In a liberal democracy with relaxed gun laws and many deaths from gun suicides and homicides, gun control by a centralized authority is likely to reduce gun deaths. If, on the other hand, you live in an increasingly illiberal society, your concerns might be different. Malcolm Harris, in a review of a collection of Spanish Civil War writing edited by Pete Ayrton entitled *¡No Pasarán!*, outlines this fear:

> The first [anecdote] is from the village of Fuenteguinaldo, and it happened in 1936 but wasn't revealed publicly for 70 years:
>
> > *Apparently, the Falangists asked the priest to draw up a list of all the reds and atheists in the village … They went from house to house looking for them. At nine o'clock at night, they were taken to the prison in Ciudad Rodrigo, and at four o'clock in the morning, were told they were*

in cultural or intellectual terrain, but also in concrete, technical, material ways.[409] See, for example, the work of the technopolitical collective Hermicity ("hermit city"),

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> *being released, but, at the door of the prison, a truck was waiting and, instead of taking them home, it brought them here to be killed.*

The second comes from the failed coup attempt in 1981:

> *I was living in a village in Castille with fewer than two hundred inhabitants. I became friendly with a young socialist who was a local councillor. When I met him one day, he was looking positively distraught. He had just found out that in February of that year, on the night Colonel Tejero burst into Parliament and the tanks came out onto the streets, the local priest had gone straight to the nearest military barracks intending to hand in a list of local men who should be arrested; my friend's name was at the top of the list.*

Someone puts your name on a list and you disappear. And maybe all the people who care enough to look for you disappear too. And no one hears what happened until everyone you ever knew is dead. That is, if you'll excuse my language, the fucking bogeyman. It scares the hell out of me.

(See Malcolm Harris, "The Fascist Bogeyman," September 21, 2016, https://medium.com/@BigMeanInternet/the-fascist-bogeyman-137b8c8b4c0e#.hgiayiy6l. Italics Harris.) There exist worlds where Harris's bogeyman poses a greater threat than Adam Lanza, James Holmes, Cho Seung-Hui, Anders Breivik, or the abrupt permanence of gun-enabled suicide. The question is both how we know we've crossed into that world ("By the time the threat seems serious, the knives are already out," Harris writes of nascent fascist movements) and what kind of choices we are willing to make when we have crossed that threshold—what norms we are willing to leave behind and to take up.

* The literature around this claim is multi-sided and colorful. Expect to be hip-deep in Nazi gun control theory (see Andrew Zelman and Richard Stevens, *Death by Gun Control* [Hartford, WI: Mazel Freedom Press, 2001], and various critical responses, e.g. Bernard Harcourt, "On Gun Registration, the NRA, Adolf Hitler, and Nazi Gun Laws" *Fordham Law Review* 73 [2004]) and also in Black Panther assertions of the right to arm oneself against the state (see Curtis J. Austin, *Up Against the Wall: Violence in the Making and Unmaking of the Black Panther Party* [Fayetteville: University of Arkansas, 2008]; and Quinn Lester, "War is Politics With Bloodshed," forthcoming, 2017).

[409] This distinction may become more urgent as proto-fascist movements seize power in more countries. It is possible that, if this dissertation were being written in the middle of a Trump administration instead of at the dawn of one, it would include an argument for power pragmatism along these lines:

which envisions "A large, beautiful and otherwise uninhabited area. Small, sturdy, comfortable micro dwellings with electricity provided by the sun. Weekly deliveries of Soylent, fresh water and other necessities by drone. And for the cypherpunks that wish for it, a stable internet connection…. Decentralized technologies increasingly allow for decentralized living. By combining the latest innovations in meatspace technology [and] smart contracts… Hermicity has created an accessible suite for individuals to establish off-grid living."[410]

> For a time, people believed that making convincing arguments mattered. For a while, depending on how you read history, it did. There seemed to exist parties, ruling coalitions, and electorates that were interested in what could be shown, via argument and evidence, to be true.
>
> That is looking more and more historically contingent, a strip of light we have passed out of and may one day pass into again. For now, however, we will have to realize that sophisticated arguments designed to show how you are *correct* are going to have to take a backseat to sophisticated thinking about *what to do in order to survive*. Means of survival, tactics, resistance, the construction of alternative infrastructure stacks: these will be the stuff of any "political theory" worthy of the name. Cultural criticism, defacing power, clever readings of intricate and gorgeous texts: well, if these defeated fascism, we'd be in a very different situation.

(I hope that this footnote will one day be regarded as an overreaction.)

[410] Yung Pure, "Hermicity: Applications in Decentralized Living and Achieving Peak Emotion," Hermicity, publication date listed as 2024, accessed July 29, 2016, http://hermicity.org/hermicity_rainbow_paper.pdf. (I am wary of the primacy groups like Hermicity place on physical separation—I'd be more inclined to use the same technics to develop a mesh of livability within current urban zones than to build an atomistic "hermit city," but the portmanteau of "shared city" is a bit dicey. As Andre Gorz writes: the answer "to the capitalist system is neither a return to the household economy and village autarky, nor the total, planned socialization of all activities: it consists, rather, in socializing the sphere of necessity… in order to *reduce to a minimum*, within everyone's life, what needs to be done, whether we like it or not." See Gorz, *Ecologica* [New York: Seagull, 2010] , 116.)

Life-support infrastructure planning moves beyond understanding separatism as a radical gesture that one either has the gumption for or not. Understanding someone's degree of involvement in a given cause as a matter of gumption, voluntarism, personal responsibility, or righteousness[411] risks pitching every new terrain of contest as one of those familiar, noble uphill battles the Left starts at the bottom of and stays there. Here's a prosaic example about the shortcomings of this sort of thinking. In the winter of 2013-2014, when Johns Hopkins' graduate school was in the midst of a debate over its proposed reorganization, the JHU Deanery abruptly offered a $4,000-per-year raise to students below their fifth year whose departments voted to accept the administration's plan. This incentive appeared to split the grad students: those in their first year stood to make an additional $16,000 if the plan went through, those in their second year $12,000, those in their third year $8,000, those in their fourth year $4,000, and those in their fifth year and beyond nothing at all.

At one point, a fellow PhD candidate of mine (a fifth year) argued that the more junior students weighing their options "just want the money." His thinking was that the graduate students and faculty who had been united in their opposition to the plan had done so for principled reasons and (partially) out of commitment to left political ideas. That anyone would abandon those positions for a cash payout signaled venality and a failure of vision. There is another way of looking at the situation, of course: one group (the Johns Hopkins administration) controls enormous wealth (both personally

[411] (which understanding reflects a variety of fundamental attribution error)

and institutionally). The other group (grad students) lacks the means to insulate themselves from questions about food security, healthcare, childcare, and rent. When one side can alter the other side's ability to feed themselves or to see a doctor, there can be little question of the venality or shortsightedness of She Who Takes the Money. She doesn't take the money because she lacks the political commitments and foresight of more senior graduate students. She takes the money because she needs to buy groceries, because rent is $880/month in Charles Village, because her JHU health plan has a $5,250 out-of-pocket maximum. The question is, as before, about who is able to get calories, shelter, heat, and so on, and what sort of system their access to these things supervenes on. The solution to the Deanery's maneuver to split the grad students was not for junior grad students to be made of "sterner stuff" (which sternness, it turns out, often reduces to being independently wealthy or on your parents' healthcare plan). Rather, it was to establish a union with a strike fund and to have terms for the consistent and fair remuneration of all grad student workers set out in a negotiated contract so that issues of who eats and who can afford medical care are not settled by administrative fiat.

Humans and the other animals—I am not aware of any exception to this—act with respect to the structures built around and within them. More flexible, resilient, efficient, less-constrained ways of getting food or information or energy—if they can be defended from forces that will assuredly come to disassemble them—can hollow out previous ways of supplying those needs. The presses of the encyclopedia Britannica had nearly run for a quarter of a *millennium* before an open-source, free

encyclopedia with essentially zero paid editorial oversight called Wikipedia emerged. The combined value of the four largest US coal producers fell from $34 billion in 2011 to $0.15 billion in 2015.[412] Changes in information technology, materials science, and manufacturing procedures change the terrain of political contest. Cheap, efficient solar panels aren't just for homeowners in Arizona who want to reduce their electrical bills. They're also a means of charging a phone without ever connecting to a grid connected to a coal-fired plant near Glen Burnie connected to miners' lungs in southwestern Pennsylvania. Or for powering a neonatal health center in Somalia.[413]

Independence from does not denote *escape from*. This fact is important to remember when building an alternative life-support stack within an existing one. Separatist movements tend to overrate the emancipatory potential of physical space and the capacity of physical distance from centers of political power to be a shield from exploitation, domination, and despoliation. In practice, separatist movements have had to confront the fact of being infrastructurally, materially, hydrologically tied to the systems they were trying to escape. When a community's shortages become acute,

[412] Trevor Houser and Peter Marsters, "The Hidden Cause of America's Coal Collapse," Rhodium Group, February 22, 2016, http://rhg.com/notes/the-hidden-cause-of-americas-coal-collapse.

[413] "The health centre, a recent addition to Garowe Hospital, provides life-saving emergency obstetric care to almost 30 women each day…. Since its installation, the solar power system has helped to… reduce Garowe Hospital's average monthly electricity bill from $6,000 to $30." See UNFP Somalia, "A Solar-Powered Maternal and Neonatal Health Centre for Somalia," 29 January 2015, http://somalia.unfpa.org/news/solar-powered-maternal-and-neonatal-health-centre-somalia.

distance can intensify, rather than weaken, these ties.[414] Hunger, sanitation, and morale become real problems. Digging your own outhouse and accepting limited access to medical care can rapidly become intolerable if you know that indoor plumbing and antiseptic gauze are on sale just down the road. Willpower, like any resource, is finite.[415] An alternative stack cannot be a practical large-scale replacement for the dominant stack until a large array of technical and practical challenges have been worked out.

Creating the preconditions for a more just world means shifting the lived experience of rejecting the dominant technology stack and the systems of oppression that it sustains and that sustain it. A choice between

a. a carbon-intensive, consumptive lifestyle in which you spend >50% of your waking hours doing something you despise so that you can afford to continue doing so until you become physically and mentally unable to continue and/or the system you've paid into collapses in a welter of blood

[414] The history of perhaps the best-known of these communities, The Farm in Lewis County, Tennessee, is a parable about the centrality of infrastructure to alternative communities. The story of The Farm doesn't just involve 1970s counterculture and radical politics: it's also made up of two-burner Coleman stoves, sewage lines and giardia outbreaks, flour mills, kerosene lamps, 12 Volt trickle charging, and slow-scan ham TV transmitters. See Albert Bates, "Lifeboats: A Memoir," *Mariposa Group*, accessed August 14, 2016, http://www.mariposagroup.org/thefarm.htm. A stroll around Zuccotti Park—the mess hall, library, sanitation facilities, evolving patchwork of nylon shelters, rows of charging laptops and smartphones—in the fall of 2011 underscores the necessity of understanding infrastructure as a central, rather than peripheral, concern for radical movements.

[415] See Roy F. Baumeister et al., "Ego depletion: Is the active self a limited resource?" *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 74 (1998): 1252–1265 and Roy F. Baumeister, "Ego Depletion and Self-Control Failure: An Energy Model of the Self's Executive Function," *Self and Identity* 1, no. 2 (2002): 129–136.

and fire

or

b. a life in which you engage in non-coerced work and have many of the same amenities you'd otherwise have, plus cleaner air and water,

doesn't just seem more appealing on a personal level: it tilts the terrain on which groups mobilize toward a self-reinforcing stitching-together of an alternative world and away from the uncertain prospect of a "revolution" that risks swapping one set of leaders and control-points for another set. As Easterling argues,

> well-rehearsed theories, like those related to Capital or neoliberalism[,] continue to send us to the same places to search for dangers while other concentrations of authoritarian power escape scrutiny. Moreover, the less dramatic or upstaged histories—regarding the growth of international organizations, the division of the radio spectrum, or the creation of the satellite, fiber-optic, and mobile telephony networks—have often been treated as bureaucratic or technical footnotes…. The things that make infrastructure space powerful—its multipliers (e.g., zones, cell phones, spatial products), its irrational fictions, or its undeclared but consequential activities—are perhaps the very things that make it immune to righteous declaration and prescription. The rational, resolute, and righteous, while cornerstones of dissent, are sometimes less consequential than the discrepant, fictional, or sly.[416]

This recalls and combines Dewey's rebuke about "the impotence and harmfulness of any and every ideal that is proclaimed wholesale and in the abstract, that is, as something in itself apart from the detailed concrete existences whose moving

[416] Easterling, *Extrastatecraft*, 22-23. *Sic.*

possibilities it embodies"[417] with Foucault's description of his own work as "working through things little by little, of introducing modifications that are able if not to find solutions, at least to change the given terms of the problem."[418]

Sly tinkerers and wayward engineers have embodied Dewey and Foucault's approach where they have begun to develop viable alternative technology stacks. When a critical mass of subareas (or, at least, the domains whose overlap makes human survival possible) have workable alternative infrastructures, older stacks may come to resemble the sad malls no one visits any more. (A mall still infested, however, with old-world snakes, lashing out in all directions, which will require political struggle and social safeguards to prepare for museum display.) The broad base of fundamental advances in materials, manufacturing, energy, computation, and so forth needed to supply grist for an alternative stack[419] exist, and certain artistic, engineering, and political collectives, like Hermicity, the P2P Foundation, those involved in the Ethereum project, and Open Source Ecology are already putting the pieces together

[417] Dewey, *Reconstruction*, 129-30.

[418] Michel Foucault, "An Interview with Michel Foucault," in *Essential Works of Foucault*, vol. 3, ed. J.D. Faubion (New York: Penguin, 1994), 288.

[419] The prospect of an alternative technology stack worth transitioning to has been envisioned by, among others, Andre Gorz: "The battle between 'proprietary software' and freeware represents the opening salvo in the central conflict of the age…. High-tech self-providing equipment is rendering the industrial megamachine [that takes care of people's basic needs] virtually obsolete." See Gorz, *Ecologica*, 38-39.

in certain domains.[420] Open Source Ecology's Global Village Construction Set project aims to create open-source blueprints for low-cost versions of the 50 industrial machines needed to replicate modern life: cement mixers, sawmills, bulldozers, agriculture tractors, seeders, well-drilling rigs, hay cutters, bakery ovens, microcombines, press forges, and so forth.[421] A Global Village Construction Set, freely available to anyone with an internet connection, democratizes and decentralizes the set of tools needed to build and maintain critical infrastructure services. Similarly, the P2P Foundation aims to develop an "open knowledge commons" that builds the technical and organizational means of moving away from existing resource-extraction and intellectual property paradigms. Using commons-based standards for sharing information rather than exclusionary standards is not merely valuable for its own sake. As P2P argues, when "naturally shareable goods are made artificially scarce… through legal repression or technological sabotage," the results can be "particularly grievous for life-saving or planet-regenerating technological knowledge."[422] Hitching technical and scientific advances to processes of capital accumulation is regrettable not only because it involves exploitation and produces inequality, but also because it sequesters the tools needed to build a survivable future.

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[420] See Pure, "Hermicity" and Michel Bauwens, "The Post-Capitalist Strategy of the P2P Foundation," July 11, 2016, http://www.resilience.org/stories/2016-07-11/the-post-capitalist-strategy-of-the-p2p-foundation.

[421] Open Source Ecology, *Global Village Construction Set*, accessed October 31, 2016, http://opensourceecology.org/wiki/Global_Village_Construction_Set.

[422] Michael Bauwens, "10 Ways to Accelerate the Peer-to-peer and Commons Economy," P2P Foundation, accessed October 31, 2016, https://blog.p2pfoundation.net/10-ways-accelerate-peer-peer-commons-economy/2016/10/03.

Note that the stacktivist outlook does not embrace technological determinism. As Alex Williams and Nick Srnicek document, technological changes are part of a shifting terrain on which political contests occur: "The use of masks is met by new legislation against it; kettling is met by apps that track police movements; the recording of police violence is met by its criminalization; mass protest is met by heavy regulation that renders it boring and sterile; non-violent civil disobedience is met by violent police brutality. Political tactics are a dynamic field of forces, and experimentation is necessary in working around new state and corporate impediments to change."[423] Technological changes do not determine any outcome in advance. Rather, they are in constant exchange with economic currents, material flows, and political struggles. What a newly-viable set of techniques *can* do, as a part of this shifting field, is render courses of action more or less feasible. It can even, as Gorz argues, engender life paths that were unworkable before: "existing tools or tools currently in development… point towards a future in which it will be possible to produce practically all that is necessary and desirable in cooperative or communal workshops; in which it will be possible to combine productive activity with learning and teaching, with experimentation and research, with the creation of new tastes, flavours and materials, and with the invention of new forms and techniques of agriculture, building and medicine."[424] None of this is locked in by a deterministic

[423] Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams, *Inventing the Future: Postcapitalism and a World Without Work* (Brooklyn: Verso, 2015), 171.

[424] Gorz, *Ecologica*, 40-41.

process: "I do not say that these radical transformations will come about. I am simply saying that, for the first time, we can wish them to come about. The means exist, as well as the people who are methodically working toward their realization."[425] The non-deterministic elements of this outlook can be highlighted by reviewing Langdon Winner's discussion of determinism in Marx: "Marx calls our attention to the fact that each generation is strongly *conditioned* or informed by a technological inheritance that it in no sense 'chose.' While it is always possible that a particular generation might wish to review this inheritance, scrutinize the patterns that technics gives to life, and make new choices on the basis of this critique, such a procedure is not in fact something that occurs to anyone to do."[426] The argument of Gorz and of this chapter is, of course, that such a procedure *is* something that should occur to anyone to do, and that this task is now being pushed forward in a variety of engineering and political settings. It is possible to agree about sociotechnical systems partially conditioning political life while disagreeing over the idea that "the sociotechnical context into which we are born must simply be accepted as given."[427] Recognizing that a sociotechnical context can be altered to enable more survivable futures is, in fact, one way of leaving a certain kind of determinism behind.

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[425] Ibid., 41.

[426] Langdon Winner, *Autonomous Technology* (Boston: MIT, 1977), 83. Emphasis Winner.

[427] Ibid.

The transition Gorz envisions and that P2P, Hermicity, and others are working to realize will involve converting existing energy-supply stacks from extractive, polluting, highly centralized networks of coal plants to cleaner, distributed power based on networks of solar panels, wind turbines, and energy storage. This transition will involve removing the centralized production of beef, which harms the planet as well as the animals on both sides of the fence, from the feeding-people stack.[428] The new stacks will rise within and alongside the old ones: as invisible skyscrapers, growing through cities and people.

§4.3 Further rivers

> Meanwhile, of course, the concrete troubles and evils remain.
>
> – Dewey

Theories, beliefs, and actions are mutually constituted by the feedback loops they share with one another. These braided loops are themselves hooked into changing social, political, and material conditions as both cause and effect.[429] Different theories

[428] Jennifer Dillard, "A Slaughterhouse Nightmare: Psychological Harm Suffered by Slaughterhouse Employees and the Possibility of Redress through Legal Reform," *Georgetown Journal on Poverty Law & Policy*, forthcoming, http://ssrn.com/abstract=1016401.

[429] Take, e.g., William E. Connolly's point that "the introduction of an idea" like "institutional racism into political life" pushes the bounds of who's considered racist, what racist action is, with determinate legal-material-social-economic effects. In this sense, "conceptual revision is not, then, a

and theoretical pursuits have different relationships to concrete outcomes. Even if the nature of these differences is multilayered and ambiguous, theories' links with, situatedness within, and ability to alter broader political and material feedback loops ought to be taken under consideration by political theorists. Or, to borrow Dewey's formulation, we ought to recognize "the tragic need for the most realistic study of forces and consequences" to be folded into philosophical inquiry.[430]

One part of this consideration involves the extent to which a given political theory ought to be reflexively influenced by the concrete outcomes to which it contributes. My aim is not to demand that theory guide practice as if from above, but to point out how practical considerations operate at the core of even abstruse theoretical work and to highlight the feedback loops that turn over there. Extending and reworking those feedback loops presents one way of exploring the jungle that lies between theories and the worlds they are deployed in.[431]

"Suppose," Eve Sedgwick writes, "one takes seriously the notion… that everyday theory qualitatively affects everyday knowledge and experience; and that one doesn't

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sufficient condition of political change, but it is indispensable to significant political change." See *The Terms of Political Discourse* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 202-203.

[430] Dewey, *Reconstruction*, 130.

[431] This suggestion can also be thought of as calling for a reworking and reassertion of the role of reflective equilibrium in political theory. See John Rawls, *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 29-32, 134; Elizabeth Anne Kinsella, "Constructivist underpinnings in Donald Schön's theory of reflective practice: echoes of Nelson Goodman," *Reflective Practice* 7, no. 3 (2006): 277–286; and Negarestani, "Labor of the Inhuman," parts I and II.

want to draw much ontological distinction between academic theory and everyday theory; and suppose that one has a lot of concern for the quality of other people's and one's own practices of knowing and experiencing. In these cases, it would make sense—if one had the choice—not to cultivate the necessity of a systematic, self-accelerating split between what one is doing and the reasons one does it."[432] If someone (not me, certainly) were to make the grave and impossible-to-prove remark that virtually every political theorist she knows, from the Marxists on up, proceeds in daily lived experience as some variety of tolerant social democrat—is this to immediately inaugurate a discussion of hypocrisy that proceeds by way of accusation and counteraccusation?[433] Or can it be the opening for a different sort of discussion, one focused on the *means* of divergence, the relationship between lived experience and the institutional application of stylized myth, the feedback loops and reciprocal relations that must operate at the junctures between abstraction, experience, and action?[434] One way of moving forward means taking seriously Dewey's proposition to

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[432] Sedgwick, "Paranoid Reading," 144-145.

[433] "What we do seem to talk about incessantly," Judith Shklar writes of intellectuals, "is hypocrisy, and not because it hides cowardice, cruelty, or other horrors, but because failures of honesty and of sincerity upset us enormously, and they are vices which we can attack directly and easily. They are easier to bear, and seem less intractable. Nevertheless, to make hypocrisy the worst of all the vices is an invitation to a Nietzschean misanthropy and to self-righteous cruelty as well. That is why hypocrisy and those who hate it are of compelling concern to anyone who puts cruelty first." See Judith N. Shklar, "Putting Cruelty First," *Daedalus* 111, no. 3 (1982): 26-27. A related Horkheimer remark: "If you produce revolutionary writings in a nonrevolutionary situation without engaging with the positive aspects of a culture, it always seems somehow hopeless." See Adorno and Horkheimer, *New Manifesto* (New York: Verso, 2011), 108-109.

[434] Though there are many exceptions—indeed, entire minor traditions—it is the case that much of the published work in political theory involves sophisticated point-plotting on an abstract plane. The writer's experientially-derived opinions remain latent or unemphasized. This partially explains, as I

move away from an approach in which "the social philosopher, dwelling in the region of his concepts, 'solves' problems by showing the relationship of ideas," and toward putting into practice a critical theory enlivened by "the sum-total of impulses, habits, emotions, records, and discoveries which forecast what is desirable and undesirable in future possibilities, and which contrive ingeniously in behalf of imagined good."[435]

In this dissertation, I have argued that pragmatism requires an inbuilt analysis of power relations to avoid defeating its own aims. A Foucauldian analysis of power relations helps pragmatism avoid becoming a rubber stamp for or dupe of dominant interests. Dewey and Foucault share several non-obvious inclinations, including anti-profundity, anti-purity, tragic meliorism, and instrumentalism. These shared stances suggest that Foucauldian understandings of power can be layered into a pragmatist analysis without overwriting core pragmatist ideas. This new pragmatism takes an unlikely avatar in Shulamith Firestone, who employs a radical pragmatism focused on destroying domination rooted in sex difference. Firestone's interest in using

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have written in earlier chapters, sudden jinks at the end of works of political theory toward occurent considerations of human welfare and survival. A writer's actual beliefs about how to act in a concrete situation and why are filtered darkly through reworkings of old books. This practice is common enough that it is easy to forget how odd it is that competing interpretations of Nietzsche or debates over how to read Rousseau should be proxy battles about or forecasts of what the interpreter's concretely-held beliefs could be. This institutional application of stylized reading also risks the rise of rituals that demonstrate one's purity, socially-transmitted obsessions with faultfinding, and a politics of personal exoneration.

[435] Dewey, *Reconstruction*,191-94.

reproductive technology to degender the future enacts a ruthless power-pragmatism in its attention to the feedback loops that sustain systems of domination and in its radical repurposing of technical systems to disrupt these feedback loops.

Finally, I moved on to stacktivism, a collection of ideas at the periphery of contemporary theory that broadens Firestone's approach. Stacktivism's central lesson, I argue, is the simple idea that political and infrastructural processes are bound up together, and that attempting to enact radical politics without a new infrastructural system—without a way of pumping water, growing food, or delivering healthcare—is like doing origami with water. No matter how well-crafted your directions, how clever your technique, the folds vanish as soon as you make them.

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